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SPEECH

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ROBIN and THE 7 HOODS

a
novelization
by Jack Pearl of the hilarious motion picture

starring
FRANK SINATRA
DEAN MARTIN

SAMMY DAVIS, JR.

Peter Falk · Barbara Rush · Victor Buono

and **BING CROSBY** as Allen A. Dale

An
Original
Edition
**POCKET
BOOKS
INC.**

A P-C Production, released by Warner Bros.
Written by David R. Schwartz. In Technicolor® and
Panavision.® Executive Producer, Howard W. Koch
Produced by Frank Sinatra. Directed by Gordon Douglas

CHICAGO SHOWDOWN or, WHO'S GOT HOODSVILLE?

"We got a new deal now, Robbo!"

"We're organized, Robbo. One big happy family. An' da boys give me da honor to be da foist leader," said Gisborne. "Ackshully, s'like when dey started da United States. All da little states got togedder an' made da Union. An' I'm da foist President."

"Give my regards to Martha," muttered Robbo.

"Better tink it over, Robbo!" Gisborne shot back.

Robbo looked across the heads of the assembled mob. "I'll give it to you straight, Mr. First President. Stay out of the North Side, because if you come over there like George Washington, I'll send you back like Abe Lincoln!"

Hood's Who:

Robbo (Frank Sinatra); *Little John* (Dean Martin); *Will* (Sammy Davis, Jr.); *Allen A. Dale* (Bing Crosby); *Guy Gisborne* (Peter Falk); *Marian* (Barbara Rush); *Sheriff Glick* (Victor Buono); and others, hoods and otherwise.

ROBIN AND THE 7 HOODS

is an original Pocket *Cardinal* edition.

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ROBIN and the 7 HOODS

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novelization by JACK PEARL

.....

screenplay by DAVID R. SCHWARTZ

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ROBIN AND THE 7 HOODS

A Pocket *Cardinal* edition

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Chapter One

Once upon a time there was a great king who ruled an empire called Chicago. There was a joke going around at the time that Chicago was situated in the state of "utter lawlessness." Truthfully, it wasn't much of a joke. The leading industries of the king's domain were bootlegging, gambling, prostitution, and the protection racket, among other things. That such enterprises were able to be conducted so harmoniously was largely due to the fact that the Chicago police force was craven and crooked. Also because the populace of the kingdom loved their king, both for making all these forbidden fruits available to one and all and for the excitement and entertainment the king and his court provided in the newspaper headlines. The king—Big Jim as he was known to his people—had a large following of princes who handled the detail work of his administration. The age of specialization was dawning, and like all good leaders Big Jim wanted only the

top men in the field managing his government. He was a beneficent boss; nobody could—or dared—deny it. He encouraged independent thought and free speech among his advisers. And if any viewpoint differed radically from his own, Big Jim would smile his tolerant, fatherly smile and sigh.

“So we’ll compromise, pal.”

Which usually meant that the dissenter would take a moonlight swim in Lake Michigan in a cement swimsuit.

It was the year nineteen hundred and twenty-eight: the year after Babe Ruth smashed his record-setting sixty home runs; the year the New York Yankees drubbed the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series in four straight; the year of the second Dempsey-Tunney fight and the historic long count; the year the nation, riding the crest of the biggest boom in its history, voted Herbert Hoover into the White House. It was the year of Big Jim’s fifty-sixth birthday.

“This calls for the biggest blowout in the history of the Loop,” Big Jim was told by one of his right-hand princes, Guy Gisborne. Gisborne was a dark, pompous man with a wide nervous smile that had all the charm of a hungry barracuda with bared teeth.

“Aw, forget it,” Big Jim said shyly.

“You rate the best, Chief.”

Big Jim grinned modestly. “I guess you’re right.”

With his soft, manicured hands and his two-

hundred-dollar suits and spats, Jim bore little resemblance to the gaunt, scowling immigrant kid who had fought his way up through the mob's echelons with a fast and unerring gun. The jowls, the graying hair, the portly belly had softened the look of the man. Only the eyes hinted at the ruthless killer who used to be. With the expensive Corona Corona cigar screwed into one corner of his broad mouth, Big Jim looked more like a banker than a rackets boss. It was bad for morale. There were rumors—whispered behind his back, of course—that the king was losing his touch. Though no one would have believed it, to observe the huge turnout for his fifty-sixth birthday party held in a private reception room of the most elegant supper club in the city. There were twenty-eight crooks picked from the top of the mob's "Blue Book," and that included Chicago's esteemed sheriff Morton Glick and his deputy Alvin Crocker, both of whom had their badges pinned proudly and conspicuously to the lapels of their formal dinner jackets. Then there was Vermin Witkowski, Soup Meat, Tomatoes McNeil, Blue Jaw, Liver Jackson, Tick, and a score of other celebrities whose faces were familiar to all of Chicago from countless newspaper photos and police line-ups; a motley sea of broken noses, beetle brows, and scarred cheeks. Still they all wore their tuxedos and smoked their dollar stogies with practiced ease.

Lobster, filet mignon, rare roast, and suckling pig

had vanished in a three-hour orgy of eating. Empty champagne bottles littered the stained white tablecloth. The great horseshoe table looked as if it had been in the middle of a buffalo stampede. The ceiling was invisible for the cigar smoke. An atmosphere of camaraderie and conviviality prevailed.

There were tears of joy in Big Jim's eyes. *His* boys were responsible for all this. How they must love him. As guest of honor, Jim was seated at the head of the table flanked on his right by Sheriff Glick and Deputy Sheriff Crocker. Actually he would have preferred some of his own boys for dinner companions. Glick and Crocker had a way of making Big Jim feel uncomfortable. After all they were cops, even if they were *his* cops. "The Bobbsey Twins," Liver Jackson called them. Both tall, erect, unsmiling men with steel-gray hair and thin noses that always twitched as if they were smelling something bad. *Smelling their rotten selves*, Jim thought privately. But, what the hell, you didn't have to like a man to do business with him.

Anyway, there was Guy Gisborne on his left. Guy was all right, Jim reflected, even if he was beginning to get a little bit ambitious. He made a mental note to talk to Robbo about Guy when Robbo and his boys got back from New Orleans. Robbo was the only one of the mob whom Big Jim really trusted. Cracking the whip on a bunch of hoods like these was a little like being in the center cage of the big top, putting an unruly bunch of man-eating tigers

through their paces. The strain got to a man after a while. Maybe it was time to retire? Big Jim sighed. Does a true king ever abdicate willingly? The hell he does! He shook himself like a wet dog. This was no night for bad thoughts. This was Big Jim's birthday, and his subjects were paying their devoted homage to him.

Guy Gisborne the toastmaster was on his feet again. "Boys, it's just about time for the main event." He pointed to the swinging doors where two waiters were pushing in a cart on which rested the biggest cake any of them had ever seen.

"O.K., you guys," Gisborne shouted, "now let's give it everything we got!" He led the singing.

"Happy boithday to you,
Happy boithday to you,
Happy boithday dear Big Jim,
Happy boithday to you. . . ."

Jim's eyes misted over as he stared at the pretty cake with the fifty-six glowing candles.

"Hey," a voice shouted from a remote part of the table. "Shouldn't there be one more for him to grow on?"

Gisborne scathed the speaker with his barracuda grin. "Go ahead, Chief, blow 'em out."

"Make a wish foist!" other voices chorused.

Giggling like a small boy, Big Jim hoisted himself to his feet, leaned across the table, and huffed and puffed. The candles were snuffed out in a great

rush of wind. There was scattered applause and stomping of feet.

"Speech! Speech!" the guests began to chant.

Big Jim stood at his place, shifting from one foot to another like a gawky adolescent. Guy Gisborne held up his hands for order, and silence descended.

Big Jim cleared his throat. "I ain't much one for speeches, you boys know that. But I do wanna thank you bums for this wunnerful boithday party. One thing I loined a long time back—anybody what ain't got no friends is a poor man. Me, I bought myself some of the best friends in the woild. Sheriff Glick here . . ." Glick acknowledged the compliment with a frozen smile. "And my pal Guy Gisborne . . ." Gisborne flashed the barracuda grin. "And Deputy Sheriff Crocker . . ." Crocker stifled a yawn.

"And all the rest of you wunnerful slobs," Jim went on, his voice thick with sentiment. "Friends what would cut off a right arm for me—all I gotta do is tell 'em whose arm."

Big Jim joined in the laughter that greeted his little joke. "Seriously, the reason I got such loyal friends is I treat 'em right. All the time I been boss here I never asked nobody to work on a holiday: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, not even on Lincoln's Boithday."

"What about St. Valentine's Day, Jim?" somebody called out.

There were hilarious hoots, and Big Jim grinned

sheepishly. "O.K., so just once I ask you to do a little clean-up job.

"Listen, today I hit fifty-six. You know I came to this country forty-four years ago without a lira in my pocket? But this is the land of opportunity, like they say. Look at me today. I got it made like John D. Rockefeller." He shook his head in admiration for the United States, for John D., and for Big Jim. "One thing I'm sorry about is my dear pal Robbo couldn't make it back from New Orleans, where he is taking in the races, in time for this party.

"Now I just wanna thank you bums again for all this. It—it gets me right in the guts, honest." He placed his hand over his solar plexus. "That's all I got to say, guys."

Before Big Jim could sit down, Guy Gisborne was on his feet, champagne glass extended high in front of him. "A toast!" he exclaimed. "To Big Jim, our pal, our leader!"

With a scuffle of feet and a scraping of chairs, the guests all rose and held up their stem glasses toward Big Jim. His face split in a big grin, and he twirled the cigar adeptly between thick lips. The grin grew even wider as he noticed that their right hands were held over their hearts, as if they were about to take a pledge of allegiance. They were so damned loyal it was embarrassing. Funny thing though—was it proper for the hand to be *inside the coat*?

It was the last thought Big Jim ever had. Twenty-eight revolvers came out of twenty-eight shoulder holsters. Twenty-eight pairs of keen eyes drew a bead on Big Jim. And twenty-eight trigger fingers tightened. The twenty-eight shots echoed like one clap of thunder in the banquet room. The silly grin was still pasted on Big Jim's face, the stogie still jutting out of a corner of his mouth. Then, very slowly, he sank rubber-legged to the floor and disappeared from sight underneath the table.

The hoods holstered their guns again, still holding on to their glasses with their left hands. Guy Gisborne leered around the table.

"Another toast, gents: The king is dead. Long live the king!" They all drank to it.

At promptly nine o'clock the following morning, the key men in Chicago's rackets met in the mob's council chamber situated in the swank Nottingham Hotel. They looked for all the world like the board of directors of a bank or business concern. Out of deference to their departed leader, they were dressed in dark suits with black mourning bands sewed to their left sleeves. All except Sheriff Glick and Deputy Crocker.

"It just wouldn't look right, Guy!" Glick protested indignantly when Gisborne accused him of not having respect for the dead. "After all, I'm the law around this city."

"Correction," Gisborne told him bluntly. "*We're*

the law in Chicago." But he didn't press the arm band.

Gisborne assumed the place of honor at the head of the conference table—right beneath a framed oil painting of a grinning Big Jim, complete with cigar, a somber black cloth draped over the top of the frame and along the sides. The air was thick with cigar smoke as he called the meeting to order.

"I just want to say a few words about the unfortunate accident last night. Sometimes things happen for the best. Let's face it, Big Jim was slipping. He was a lousy leader and a slob. A real shmendrik. And on top of everything else, he wasn't even an American citizen. You all know I was never one for waving the flag, but I do believe in the American way of life. That's what our organization stands for, and we're gonna keep it that way.

"*Organization*, you hear that? That's what's been wrong under Big Jim. There really wasn't no organization. Just a lotta little operations hanging together very loosely. Too much independence can be a bad thing. That's why Abe Lincoln started the Civil War. We just couldn't have all those southern states running around and doing whatever they wanted to do. Now the same thing is true here in Chicago. All the rackets—bootlegging, gambling, everything—is gonna be moiged into one big operation. Just like General Motors did. Then you'll see what efficiency really is."

shmendrik

A hand went up at the center of the table. "Who's gonna be in charge of this operation?" Vermin Witkotski wanted to know.

Guy Gisborne smiled wickedly. "Just like they pick a President of the United States. An honest election."

Sheriff Glick cleared his throat and spoke in stentorian tones. "Gentlemen, as sheriff of this city, it is my duty to keep law and order. It wasn't easy under Big Jim with everybody knocking everybody else off. We can't afford to have another bungler like Big Jim in Chicago. The crime commission is getting stronger, and the public is getting fed up with all the shooting and the bad publicity the city is getting. We need a leader with strength, integrity and courage. Therefore I would like to nominate for president of this organization the one man I know of who meets all these qualifications. That man is Guy Gisborne."

The nomination was greeted by apathetic silence. Using the butt of his snub-nosed automatic as a gavel, Gisborne rapped three times on the table. "O.K., so we got one name on the ticket. Are there any more nominations?"

Vermin Witkotski raised his hand. "Mister Chairman—"

Gisborne interrupted him. "You wanna say something, Vermin? Make a motion?" He kept rapping softly on the table with the pistol gavel, the muzzle pointing directly in the direction of Witkotski.

Vermin's sallow complexion was pea green now. "Uh-huh," he floundered. "Yes, I would like to make a motion that—" he hesitated, looking wildly around him—"that somebody open a window in this room. The cigar smoke is getting me." He feigned a coughing fit.

Guy Gisborne relaxed and ran a hand over his slickly pomaded black hair. The barracuda grin was radiant. "Vermin's right. It is stuffy in here. Open a window." He scowled. "And not the one on the stockyard side either."

Gisborne rapped three more times with his formidable gavel. "Being this is a democratic meeting, I now make a motion that nominations be closed. I'm the only candidate, so it looks like I'm the new leader, boys. Thanks for your confidence. Now let's get on to business."

A sullen hood with an emery jaw spoke up. "Ain't you forgetting something, Guy? Robbo!"

Gisborne shrugged. "Don't worry, Blue Jaw. Robbo will fall in line."

"I ain't so sure. He ain't gonna like what happened to Big Jim. They was like father and son, you know that. Big Jim took Robbo out of the gutter and made him what he is today. He ain't gonna like it, Guy."

Gisborne dismissed it irritably. "Robbo is in—or he is under." He patted the gun symbolically. "Now let's get to the first matter at hand. You guys are

gonna keep on running your operations just like before. Only thing is now you're gonna have guaranteed pertection straight from City Hall." He paused. "Naturally there'll be a small soivice charge."

"How much of a soivice charge, Chief?" asked Tomatoes.

"Fifty per cent," was the bland reply.

The other hoods sat up in their chairs now, shifting restlessly. There were murmurs of protest.

"For my part, I'll take a little less soivice," grumbled an unhealthy-looking man.

Gisborne fixed him with hooded eyes. "You can get less soivice, Gimp. But you still pays the fifty per cent." Sharply, he silenced the others before they could speak. "Now if there are any more beefs, we got a special complaint box which is six feet long and three feet wide."

In a more cajoling tone, he went on. "Sure, pals, I know that fifty per cent is high. I don't like it no more than you do. But half of that fifty goes to the sheriff here."

Sheriff Glick studied his impeccably manicured fingernails and said with slight annoyance. "You've seen my grubber list, Guy. I can't manage with less."

Briefly Gisborne's eyes were flint-hard on the aristocratic-looking sheriff. "You might try scratching off a few cousins, Glick," he said softly.

Glick sneered at him disdainfully. "I'm scratching nothing, Guy."

Gisborne regarded him thoughtfully and a little ominously, but at last he shrugged in resignation. "I make a motion we make the fifty per cent soivice charge official. Any objections, gentlemen?" The faces around him were gloomy, but no one raised a hand. "O.K., guys, now it's official. We is organized. You know, this is the greatest thing ever happened to our perfession. I kinda feel like George Washington when he foist organized his mob and signed the Declaration of Independence." Gisborne was beaming. "And another thing, I want all you boys to think of me as a big brother. You need help, you come to old Guy. What's mine is yours and what's yours is mine—right?"

Blue Jaw scraped his steel-wool chin with his fingernails. "I know what's mine is yours, Chief. But what's yours that's mine?"

The barracuda smile was at its best. "I'm glad you asked that, Blue Jaw. The answer is: NUTTIN!"

At that moment the conference was jarringly interrupted by a loud commotion in the hallway outside the room.

"*You can't go in there!*" cried the muffled voice of one of Gisborne's guards posted outside the door. This was followed by the sickening crunch of fist against flesh, and other equally violent sounds. It was over very quickly. Then the door flew open and crashed back against the wall. The hoods were on their feet, quick as cats, guns drawn. Then, as they recognized the visitors, they relaxed.

"Robbo!" Gisborne exclaimed. "We didn't expect you back so soon."

A slight, wiry, intense man with piercing black eyes and an angular face stepped across the threshold. "I'll bet you didn't expect me," he snapped. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at one of Gisborne's guards propped up unconscious against the far wall of the hallway. "Your boy didn't have very good manners."

He walked over to Gisborne with quick, determined strides, flanked by two of his own boys, one of them a muscular Negro with alert eyes that swept the assembly around the table, tensed for action in the event any one of them made an unfriendly gesture—like drawing a bead on his boss Robbo for instance. But the hoods—with the possible exception of Gisborne—seemed glad to see the new arrivals. Several of them grinned, winked, and called out to him.

Robbo stopped in front of Gisborne and tipped up the brim of his expensive fedora. He rested his fists on his hipbones, ignoring the other man's outstretched hand.

"Who hit Big Jim?" he demanded.

The smile never left Gisborne's face. "You want the list in alphabetical order?"

A tic worked in one of Robbo's taut white cheeks. "Who was the brain?"

Gisborne continued to smile but did not answer.

Then Sheriff Glick's oily voice interceded. "Big Jim had lost control, Robbo. There were thirty-four killings in Chicago in the last two months. The people are getting fed up. Big Jim had to go for the good of the rest of us."

Robbo turned to stare at the sheriff with sudden comprehension. His voice was acid with anger and revulsion. "Sheriff, don't ever take that badge off, 'cause you'll never live to pin it back on again."

Glick, whitefaced, took a step toward Robbo. Gisborne stepped between them. "Pals, come on now, let's cut out this fighting among ourselves. Calm down, Robbo, and I'll break the good news to you. There ain't gonna be no more fighting and back-biting each other, never any more. From now on it's one for all and all for one, like them musketeers. One big happy family. The rackets is organized, Robbo." He threw out his chest in manly pride. "And guess what, Robbo, the boys really gave me a big honor—they elected me to be their foist leader."

Faintly amused, Robbo surveyed the long, unhappy faces around the table. He shook his head. "Looks like the day they fixed the electricity in the death house."

Gisborne placed a hand on his arm. "Listen to me, Robbo. Everybody manages his own operation, just like before. Only difference is we all get pertection from the top." He nodded at Sheriff Glick.

"For fifty per cent of the take," a loud voice said from the table.

"I was just saying to the boys," Gisborne enthused, "that it's like when they started the United States. All them colonies getting together and forming a Union." He grinned. "And I'm the foist president."

Robbo shook off the other man's hand and walked to the door. "Give my regards to Martha!"

"Hey, Robbo," Gisborne called after him. "Not so fast. Where are you going?"

"To get some fresh air—over at the stockyards." He paused in the doorway and turned. He addressed Gisborne. "Mister President, I'll give it to you straight. You want to play games, stay in your own backyard. Stay out of the North Side."

He strode off down the hallway with quick strides, sandwiched in protectively between his two bodyguards: Will, who was reputed to be the fastest gun ever to hit Chicago, and Six Second, who had come by his title in the prize ring.

"No boy ever lasted longer than six seconds with me when I was right," he had stated candidly when he was applying for the job with Robbo. It gave a man a safe feeling to have reliable people like Will and Six Second in your organization, Robbo reflected as they emerged from the hotel and climbed into the big black limousine parked at the curb.

"Home, James," he told the driver and slumped into a corner of the seat, a small dapper man who didn't appear nearly big enough or brave enough to

defy Guy Gisborne, Sheriff Glick, and their syndicate. For one uncertain moment he wondered why the hell he had done it. But he knew that answer. For Big Jim.

Chapter Two

The funeral of Big Jim Boloni was the acme of gangland pageantry. Gisborne, the new king, took personal charge of the arrangements in accordance with "The Code." And it must be said in his favor that he did a splendid job. It was clear from the start that the departed would have to be laid out in a large hall to accommodate the mourners—together with their floral pieces—who would flock to Chicago from all parts of the country to pay their last respects. Tomatoes McNeil suggested that they hire the Bijou Theater, but Gisborne vetoed that on the grounds that it would be bad taste to put Big Jim on display in an ex-burlesque joint. They finally settled on the Masonic Temple.

"It's got class," Gisborne said, feeling very proud of the dignified way in which he was conducting matters.

Not all the visitors got to attend the burial, though. Only fifty of U.S. Gangland's elite brass

piled into the long, sleek, polished black limousines which were to follow the hearse to the cemetery. Honored as pallbearers were Gisborne, Robbo, Sheriff Glick, Deputy Sheriff Crocker, Will, and Six Second.

Shady Glade Burial Park was situated in Cicero, on the fringe of the big city. It was a picturesque spot amply landscaped with pines and elms and surrounded by a black wrought-iron picket fence. The motorcade passed through the gates and wended its way slowly along the winding paths that were covered with crushed bluestone instead of cement.

"Real class," commented Gisborne, rolling his fat cigar in the corner of his mouth the way Big Jim had always done it. "Nuttin but the best for the big guy."

No expense had been spared to put the dead king away in style. The burial plot, purchased out of mob funds, was approximately the size of a softball diamond. Even so, by the time the visiting dignitaries had taken their places around the grave and the mountain of flowers had been stacked, space was at a premium. Gisborne, Robbo, Glick, Crocker, Will, and Six Second were in the front row, practically on top of the bier.

Will was infatuated with the elaborate casket, genuine mahogany, hand carved with turtledoves and cherubs and trimmed with sterling silver.

"Almost too pretty to cover up with dirt," he whispered to Robbo. "They ought to put it on display in Wrigley Field or something."

Six Second was more concerned with the blanket of roses on top of the coffin, red and white tea roses with a border of blue roses running all around it.

"I never hoid of blue roses, did you, Robbo?"

Robbo shrugged. "You got the long green, you can buy blue roses. It's a nice touch, red, white, and blue. Big Jim was a real patriot. You remember during the war when he had that big black market operation going for him? He always gave priority to old ladies with sons in uniform."

Gisborne had been forced to abandon the idea of conventional religious services at the graveside because it had been impossible to find a clergyman—of any faith—who would preside.

"I'll handle it myself," he announced to the Board of Directors. "Just like during the war when I was in the Navy. A guy kicks off, and the captain says a few woids over the body before they feed it to the sharks."

When all the mourners were settled down, Gisborne placed one hand on the casket. "Let's have a little quiet here. I wanna say a few woids about our dear departed former pal, Big Jim. I knowed Jim a helluva long time, and I wanna say that this was one man who didn't have no enemies. He had a lotta friends who didn't like him, but you can't please everybody. Some people called Jim a chiseler, a fink, and a crooked hood. Other people . . . well . . . they didn't have nuttin good to say about him. I can tell you one thing. Big Jim was *good*! He was a good . . .

a very good dresser. Everybody knows that. He looked kinda mean on the outside, but on the inside . . . well, inside . . . inside his closet he had two hundred neckties. . . . I could talk about Big Jim for hours, but we gotta get this show on the road. So right now I'd like to introduce Robbo, who was very close to Big Jim in the past." He turned the barracuda grin on Robbo, adding, "And maybe will be even closer in the future."

At an adjacent plot a solemn religious ceremony was getting underway. A group of little boys dressed in flowing choir vestments launched enthusiastically into a burial hymn in their high soprano voices. Robbo glanced their way briefly and swallowed hard as their words rang out clear in the still air:

"Give praise! Give praise! Give praise! . . ."

Emotionally overwrought, he took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. "I just wanna say that Big Jim has gone to meet the Big G. Big Jim was no angel, but he had class." He cast an accusing look in Gisborne's direction. "When Jim wanted to take over from the previous leader, Hungry Izzy, he treated his old pal with dignity and respect. He had Izzy framed and deported. . . . Big Jim was a great inspiration to me. When I was a kid, he caught me stealing the hub caps off his Packard. You know what he said? He said, 'Kid, you gotta aim high in this life. Don't steal the hub caps. Steal the Packard.' . . . Anyway, goodbye, old pal. Gonna miss you."

Gonna be a long time before we see another like you, Big Jim."

The choir boys were singing lustily, "*Give praise! Give praise! Give praise!*"

Robbo stepped back in place and nodded at Will. From a small leather case held in his left hand, Will removed a bugle. Lifting it to his lips he performed an off-key but commendable version of "Taps."

"Ready for the salute, boys!" Gisborne shouted.

The hoods clustered around the grave all drew out pistols and held them at arm's length pointing into the air. As the final note of "Taps" echoed across the cemetery, a fifty-gun salute thundered into the sky. The muzzles were still smoking when a startling thing happened. Far back in the ranks, near the perimeter of Big Jim's plot, a stooped, weasel-faced hood held a Thompson submachine gun aloft and emptied the magazine into the air in a wild staccato symphony. When it was over he let the gun fall to his side and withered under the outraged stares of the VIPs of gangland.

"There's always a showoff in the crowd," Gisborne said in disgust. "What you think this is, Humpy, the Fourth of July? Don't you have no dignity at all?"

As the coffin descended slowly into the depths on its hydraulic elevator, Robbo, Will, and Six Second turned away and made for their car.

Gisborne started after him. "Hey, Robbo, wait a minute. I wanna talk with you."

Robbo did not look back, and as Gisborne started after him Sheriff Glick laid a restraining hand on his arm. Gisborne bared his teeth fiercely, but followed the sheriff to his own limousine.

Because their limousine was boxed in by the traffic jam, Robbo, Will, and Six Second stood off to one side underneath a sprawling elm tree and lit up cigars. When the last car pulled away, they walked briskly to their limousine. Robbo had his hand on the door handle when another car purred up silently behind it. His eyes widened. A Rolls Royce with solid gold trim and a liveried chauffeur behind the wheel.

Impressed and curious, the three hoods stared as the chauffeur popped out of his seat and ran around the car to open the door for his passenger.

"Maybe it's President Hoover?" Six Second suggested.

"Don't be a nut!" Will growled. "Hoover ain't in the White House yet."

Robbo's eyes widened still further as a long, sleek silken leg poked out of the car, exposed to halfway up the rounded thigh. The promise of the limb was more than fulfilled when the rest of the girl appeared. She was tall, dark, aloof, with her hair piled in shining coils one on top of the other. She was an aristocratic beauty of the type Robbo had only glimpsed before in the newspaper society page pictures. Her small black veil and high-necked black dress were in the best taste to fit the occasion, yet

the way the silk hugged the lines of her body stirred Robbo far more than any burlesque stripper could have—even on down to the last of her seven veils. In her black-gloved hand she carried a single rose. And as the men watched, entranced, she minced across the turf to Big Jim's grave where the gravediggers were mounding up the last of the dirt. Without a word or a look at anyone, she stooped and placed the rose carefully at the head of the grave. Then she walked swiftly back to her Rolls, got in, and was whisked away.

The hoods stared after the car in blank wonderment.

"She musta come to the wrong stash," Will said.

"We shoulda told her," Six Second agreed. "It ain't respectful for Big Jim to be mixed up with somebody's Aunt Gussie. What do you think, boss?"

Robbo was glassy-eyed. "I think she's the most beautiful woman I ever seen."

Will frowned. "You figure she was a relative maybe?"

Robbo shook his head. "Big Jim had nobody. Only a brother in Salerno."

Will sighed. "That sure wasn't Big Jim's brother!"

It was a typical lower-middle-class neighborhood on Chicago's North Side. On both sides of the street drab, attached brownstones stretched off in identical monotony as far as the eye could see, their façades pitted and run-down. Steep stone steps led up to

recessed entryways high above street level. A shorter flight of steps descended to cheaper basement apartments, their hooded entrances underneath the front steps. Robbo's Club, like so many other gambling establishments and speakeasies of the Twenties, was located inconspicuously in the basement of one of these brownstones. No neon signs, no billboards. It's only advertisement was the line-up of expensive automobiles parked bumper to bumper along both curbs in this block.

It was a little after nine o'clock on the night of Big Jim's funeral when Guy Gisborne and his henchman Blue Jaw parked their black limousine in front of Robbo's Club. They walked briskly down the short flight of steps and ducked into the alcove underneath the brownstone's front stairs. Blue Jaw's knuckles rapped out a coded tattoo on the heavy oak door. Immediately a slotted peephole yawned in the door and yellow light spilled out on the faces of the two visitors. A pair of suspicious eyes regarded them.

"It's Gisborne," the mob leader identified himself.
"Wanna see Robbo."

"He ain't in yet," the guard said.

"We'll wait."

The eyes blinked. But after a moment's hesitation the door opened. The conversion of the brownstone's basement into a gambling casino was a thoroughly professional job, and the subterranean atmosphere gave it a quality of warmth and exclusiveness that

was absent in many more ostentatious clubs. A bank of crap tables sat against one wall. Two roulette wheels occupied the center of the room. There were card tables and the inevitable slot machines wedged into wall space too small to accommodate anything else. A well-stocked bar ran half the length of the wall nearest the door, and two pool tables with bright green felts accounted for the space beyond the bar. At the end of the room in the pool area there was a door marked PRIVATE in gold letters. It was Robbo's office.

Gisborne led the way to the bar, scowling at the crowded gambling facilities. "Lotsa action tonight," he said to the bartender as he and Blue Jaw settled on leather-topped bar stools.

The bartender, an ex-ax murderer who looked the part, polished the bar in front of Gisborne with a dirty towel. "Naw, it's slower than usual."

Wistfully Gisborne watched a houseman carry a bulging cash box toward the office. "And half of the take is rightly mine."

Blue Jaw nodded solemnly.

"What'll it be, Mister Gisborne?" asked the bartender.

"Nuttin, I'm waitin' to see Robbo."

"There's one ahead of you," the bartender told him. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the pool tables, where a lone man was practicing bank shots in clumsy fashion at the table nearest the bar.

Gisborne frowned at him. "Who is he?"

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"Never seen him before. Looks like he ain't been long out of the barrel."

Gisborne winced as the stranger bungled an easy shot for the side pocket. "Shoots a lousy game of pool, don't he?"

The bartender's meaty forehead rippled in annoyance. "He's got other things on his mind. 'Scuse me, Mister Gisborne." He ambled bearlike to the other end of the bar where a cute waitress was waiting to place an order. She wore spike heels, long mesh stockings, and an abbreviated costume that barely covered her vital statistics.

"That fink botherin' you, honey?" the bartender asked as he mixed sidecars.

The girl glanced across her shoulder at the man at Table One. "Naw, he ain't my type." But her eyes lingered on him nevertheless.

He was an attractive man in his mid-thirties, dark with chiseled features and a shock of unruly hair that curled down over his forehead. He had sleepy eyes, and his movements around the table were unhurried. People who saw Little John for the first time frequently regarded him as lazy and lethargic. Some of them had paid dearly for the misconception. In truth he possessed the leisurely arrogance of a big cat.

He appeared not to notice the waitress as she passed behind him to serve drinks to the players at the other pool table. Then quite casually he bent over the table and forked the cue stick between

splayed fingers to line up a shot. As he drew back the cue, the weighted butt tapped her gently on the buttocks. She stifled a gasp and straightened up. Twice more the probing cue stick goosed her.

That was too much! She spun around and slammed her empty tray against the offending cue with a loud clang. Her face was flaming.

"Listen, buster! Ain't you playing with the wrong end of that stick?"

Little John faced her, his expression bland. "Sorry, honey. Thought I recognized you. Remarkable resemblance to a gal I once knew in Indiana."

"Oh yeah? Well, you better blow right back to dear old Indiana. And don't stop for a drink either. The bartender is my boy friend!"

He glanced toward the bar and smiled pleasantly at the glowering bartender. Absently he picked up the cue chalk and fumbled with it. "All I had in mind was a quiet game of pool."

The girl's eye flared. "Oh yeah? Then how come you're chalking your finger?"

Little John blinked twice and held up his hand. The tip of his forefinger was coated neatly with blue dust. He flashed her a boyish smile and turned to the table. Effortlessly he tapped the cue ball with the chalked finger. It hit the eight ball dead center, and the eight ball caromed off two cushions and rolled lazily to the lip of a side pocket. It hung there an instant, then dropped in. Little John turned back to the girl and said with aplomb:

"For short shots."

She regarded him with mouth agape as he dipped the chalked finger into a stale drink standing on the side of the table and wiped it carefully with the handkerchief in his breast pocket.

Guy Gisborne was so absorbed by the scene between Little John and the waitress that he didn't notice Robbo enter the club with Will and Six Second until he felt the firm hand on his shoulder.

"I told you to stay out of the North Side," Robbo said evenly.

Gisborne smiled his nasty smile. "Robbo, I got a confession to make. You was right about the sheriff crossing Big Jim. And I was thinking. If that's what's standing between you and me—well—soitin arrangements can be made. You know what I mean?"

"I do my own laundry," Robbo snapped.

Gisborne tapped his cigar into a spittoon. "This bundle is extra dirty."

"I can manage." Robbo's voice was cold. "Anything else?"

Gisborne stared moodily at the ash on his cigar. His voice was flat. "No, that's it."

"Have a drink and beat it." Robbo signaled to the bartender.

Gisborne was unruffled. "Look, Robbo. You and me, we're no betweeners. Either we're the best of friends or the woist of enemies. Let's be friends."

"Your drink is waiting." Robbo walked away with Will and Six Second on his heels.

Gisborne shook his head sadly. "Too bad," he said to Blue Jaw. "He's got so much to live for. . . . C'mon, let's get out of this dump."

On the way to his office Robbo acknowledged familiar faces at nearby tables with a casual smile and a wave of his hand. As he came abreast of the pool table nearest the bar, his path was blocked by a haunch and leg jutting far out into the aisle. Little John was studying a difficult ricochet shot. Robbo stopped short, more amused than annoyed.

"You're blocking the road, pal," he said politely.

John didn't look up. "So, take a detour."

Will's hand streaked inside his jacket to his gun.

Robbo held up a restraining hand and said with ominous calm, "I don't take detours, friend."

Frowning, Little John straightened up and faced Robbo. He studied the smaller, frailer man contemptuously. His voice was bored. "A little more respect, sonny, or you may find six friends holding you by the handles."

Will snarled and tried to pull his gun, but Robbo's left hand was locked on his wrist. "Aw, come on, boss!" Will pleaded. "Let me give him a few schmice. Just around the head!"

"Boss?" John looked startled. "You're not— Robbo?"

Robbo's eyes were as cold as a rattlesnake's. "Too bad you can't shoot pool with that tongue. It's pretty sharp."

John grinned sheepishly. "Don't like the taste of chalk."

"Who are you, anyway?"

John looked away and hefted the cue ball in his hand. "I'm a bird lover. Pigeons are my specialty."

"Do tell!" Robbo studied John thoughtfully. Then with a smug grin he snapped his fingers and nodded in the direction of the cue rack on the wall. Will grabbed a stick and passed it to him.

"You name the game, pal," Robbo said.

"It's your table," John replied wearily.

"Rotation. One hundred a ball, O.K.?"

John yawned. "Never carry hundreds. Might get picked up for vagrancy. A thousand too steep for you?"

Robbo flushed and balled his fists, but maintained his control. "Douse the lights," he ordered in a tight voice.

The bartender pulled a series of switches underneath the bar, and all the lights in the joint faded with the exception of a pair of bulbs with green shades dangling above Table One. There was loud complaint from the gambling tables, until the word got around. In minutes there was a mob of excited spectators ringing the pool table.

While Six Second was racking the balls, Little John turned to Robbo. "I bore easy. How about goosing the action with a little side bet?"

Robbo restrained himself with difficulty. "You name it, pal," he said in a strangled voice.

"Twenty-five grand on the game?"

Robbo's eyes narrowed. "You talk big, feller, but I wonder how your Dun and Bradstreet rates. Will!"

Moving swiftly, Will flipped open John's jacket and frisked the inside pockets. He drew forth two bulging billfolds. John merely smiled as he handed them to Robbo. Robbo riffled through the deck of greenbacks in each without counting, and handed the wallets back to John. For the first time there was a note of respect in his voice.

"Triple-A. O.K., so it's seven ways to game at a grand a way."

"And twenty-five more for kicks," John added.

Robbo pulled a fat roll out of his hip pocket, and both men counted off the thousand-dollar notes and heaped them on the table."

"You name the stake holder," Robbo said magnanimously.

John looked up and caught the eye of the cute waitress of the cue-stick incident. He grinned and called her over. "I didn't notice your face until now—it's honest. You're elected, doll."

Robbo won the right to break and hummed softly to himself as he chalked his cue.

"Tune sounds familiar," John drawled. "What is it?"

"'Any Man Who Loves His Mother,'" Robbo said. He bent over the table and rocketed the cue ball into the pack. The balls scattered wildly, but not a one dropped. He cursed softly to himself.

"My favorite song," John said with a broad grin. To Robbo's surprise, he knew the words, and sang them softly as he proceeded to wield the cue with craftsmanship that was a far cry from the ineptness he had displayed earlier in the evening.

"One ball in the corner pocket!"

It dropped. And was followed by the two, three, and four balls in quick succession. The crowd watched, hypnotized, as he ran off the next ten balls, each one hit squarely and with authority, each one flying straight and true to the drop. He finished the last stanza of the song and sighed.

"Fifteen ball in the side pocket." It fell.

The spectators exhaled in unison. A few people clapped. Will and Six Second looked to Robbo for their cues—and they weren't thinking about pool. The boss man had never been humiliated in this fashion before, pool or no pool. Robbo had a few bad moments, but he came back manfully. With a weak grin, he extended his right hand to John.

"I bow to an artist."

John accepted the hand and returned the grin. "Hate to be a sore winner, but your cushions are a little tired. Threw me off my game."

Robbo laughed in genuine good humor now and waved to the cute waitress. "Pay the man."

The house lights went on again, and the customers flocked back to the gaming tables, charged with fresh enthusiasm for the cards and the dice and the wheel. They had seen it happen. *The house*

could lose! And any one of them might be the next to clobber Robbo.

John gathered up the thousand-dollar notes from the serving tray and stuffed them carelessly in his pockets. As an afterthought he retrieved one of them and tucked it delicately into the décolleté V of the waitress's costume, between her bunched breasts.

"I like a bank with strong assets," he whispered into her ear.

The girl beamed. "Thank *you!* I really don't deserve it!"

John winked at her. "In time you will."

Robbo thumbed her away and looked at John. "What do you do besides play pool?"

"I'm a brain surgeon," John said pleasantly.

Robbo laughed. "Let's step into the operating room." He led the way to his private office with Will tailing close behind Little John, still not entirely trusting the cocky intruder.

Chapter Three

Robbo's office was almost Spartan in its simplicity. An inexpensive desk, a few second-hand chairs, file cabinets, and an enormous picture of Big Jim in a gold frame on the wall behind the desk. There was one appointment that was ostentatious, a professional barber's chair in one corner of the room. John grinned and settled himself in the barber's chair as Robbo slouched into the swivel chair behind his desk. Will perched on one corner of the desk, his keen eyes and gun hand alert.

Robbo motioned to a portable bar near the barber's chair. "Drink? Help yourself."

"No thanks."

Robbo took a cigar out of the canister on his desk and offered it to John, who shook his head. Instead he took a pack of cigarettes out of an inside pocket. "I'll stick with these."

Robbo stared moodily at the cigar in his hand, then swung around in the swivel chair and glanced

up at the portrait of Big Jim. "Funny thing, I never really went for stogies much myself. But the big guy was always my idol. You know how kids ape people they respect." He gave a curt phlegmy laugh. "Now the damned things remind me of Guy Gisborne." He dropped the cigar back into the canister with distaste. "So what's your name, pal?"

John blew a cloud of smoke at the low ceiling. "My friends call me Little John."

"Your last name?"

"Which one?"

Robbo laughed. "I apologize." He looked at Will. "You ever hear of this boy, Will?"

Will's eyes narrowed on John. "Didn't you run an operation down near the Indiana line?"

John nodded. "Beer, alky, dice. Nothing big."

"What you doing in Chi?" Robbo demanded.

"Looking for a new connection."

"Surprised you didn't look up Gisborne first."

"I didn't."

"Why?"

John's eyes opened candidly. "Crooked hood."

The longer Robbo knew Little John, the more he was coming to like him. "I guess you know that this town is back to two slices. Me and Gisborne."

"Yeah."

"He's well organized. Got eighty-five guns, plus the sheriff's office. I got me an even dozen, plus a dame who used to be a knife thrower in a carnival. If you like long shots, come on in."

John eased himself out of the barber's chair and walked slowly over to the desk. He met Robbo's eyes squarely.

"I'm in—boss."

Robbo got up and the two men shook hands firmly. Even Will relaxed now. "Welcome aboard," he told John.

"I may as well tell you what you let yourself in for, John," Robbo said, slumping back into his chair. "Gisborne is gonna hit me. Fast. Only thing is I don't know where. My brewery, this place—"

Will cut in. "With eighty-five guns he can knock everything over at once."

John stared thoughtfully at the glowing tip of his cigarette. "Ever think of knocking first?"

Will and Robbo looked at each other with raised eyebrows, then both stared at John as if he were crazy.

"You don't hear good," Robbo said patiently. "He's got eighty-five guns. He can knock seven times harder than I can."

"Ever see a tiny ninety-pound doll handle a two-hundred-pound masher? Their mamas teach 'em young to hit in the most tender spot."

"So?"

"So where is Gisborne most tender? What's his pride and joy?"

Will grinned. "The Full House Café."

"The last thing Gisborne is expecting is a visit

from you, Robbo, especially at the Full House. What better reason is there for paying him that visit?"

Robbo looked skeptical.

"We got nothing to lose, boss. We're gonna get it anyway," Will said eagerly.

Robbo scratched his chin. "If we wait a while we might pick up a few more guns."

John shook his head. "Or you might lose a few. When your opponent's sitting with all the aces, only one thing to do—kick over the table."

"We'll do it!" Robbo sat up ramrod-stiff, imbued with sudden determination. "When?"

John pinched out his butt over the ashtray. "What's wrong with right now?"

It was a damp night with a cold wind blowing in off the lake. The men turned up the collars of their overcoats as they filed out of the rear entrance of Robbo's Club and piled into the two limousines crouched like black panthers with headlights glowing dimly like cats' eyes. Will and Six Second got into the front seat of the lead car with the driver. Robbo, John and another hood got in back. The second car carried six more of Robbo's toughest boys. The black Packards purred down the alley and turned into the street, headed for the Full House Café.

Conversation was held to a minimum, each man lost in his own thoughts, as it is with soldiers going into battle. Halfway across town, a red light halted

them. The driver of the first car drummed impatiently on the wheel with his fingers. Abruptly Will broke the silence.

"Robbo! Across the intersection! Isn't that one of Gisborne's cars?"

Robbo and John bent over the back of the front seat and stared through the windshield. "Sure is," Robbo said. "I see Blue Jaw at the wheel."

The light flashed green and the expedition rolled on again. The cars of the rival mobs, practically identical in appearance, passed each other moving in opposite directions.

"Gisborne and the sheriff are in the back seat," Robbo observed.

"They got two cars too," Will said. "I wonder where they're heading."

Little John laughed softly in the darkness. "Wherever it is, he's sure in for a surprise when he gets back!"

The Full House Café was one of the most elaborate "private" clubs in Chicago. No basement layout, it occupied the entire first floor of a brownstone on the South Side, brazenly flouting Gisborne's connections with the police.

The two limousines pulled up silently in front of the club and double-parked with the engines idling. Led by Robbo, the dozen hoods disembarked with pickaxes, crowbars, hatchets, and sledges. In brisk formation they ran up the front steps of the brown-

stone and burst through the double doors without knocking.

Two of Gisborne's guards, dressed in evening clothes, tried to intercept them. One took a crow-bar in the solar plexus; the other faded beneath a blackjack. The frightened customers milled about in pandemonium at first until Robbo ordered a volley fired at the ceiling.

"Let's have some quiet here, folks!"

That subdued them, and Robbo hopped up on a chair and addressed the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, don't get excited. This joint is about to close down for alterations. Now, nobody's gonna get hurt if you leave in an orderly fashion. Mr. Gisborne will redeem your chips at some future date. Thank you, and bon voyage." He grinned at his crew. "O.K., boys, have a good time."

With howls of glee the hoods descended on the gambling equipment like locusts, smashing, bashing, chopping, slicing. Everything was reduced to basic material. Mounds of splintered wood. Metal scrap heaps. Shredded cloth. Gallantly, Robbo forewent the pleasure of participating in the games to play escort to the ladies and gentlemen as they hurried out of the club.

"Come and see us again," he said gaily to a buxom matron, patting her fondly on the fanny.

Six Second, having demolished a dozen slot machines, looked for other diversion. His eyes lit on the bar, and he hefted a chair and approached it

eagerly. There was a lone bottle of scotch standing in his way on the counter, and he shoved it aside impatiently. Unexpectedly there was a pistol shot, and the bottle vaporized under his hand. Six Second's mouth opened wide and he leaped backwards as if he had touched a poisonous snake. His face reddened in anger as Will ambled over to the bar with his revolver in his hand, the barrel still smoking.

"What the hell you trying to do, Will?" Six demanded.

Will grinned. "Bar's my territory."

"You coulda killed me."

"You know I never miss," Will said with some indignation.

Six grumbled and counted his fingers. "All I know is I better have five."

With his finger through the trigger guard, Will spun the gun like a pinwheel. "Six, you figure you saw good pool tonight?" He inclined his head toward Little John who was soothing a hysterical cocktail waitress. "You figure John plays a cushion shot better than me? Then observe!"

His gaze moved upward. "The ceiling." Then downward. "The bar rail." Then to one side. "The cuspidor." Then to the wall. "The hatrack." And finally to the backbar. "And the cash register."

Six looked bewildered as Will pointed his gun at the ceiling and pulled the trigger. The path of the slug was too fast to trace with the human eye, but

plaster splattered, the bar rail vibrated with a dull *clunk*, the cuspidor spun and rang like a bell, the hatrack fell to the floor, and, at last, the cash register trembled, and the cash drawer flew open. Will grinned as the NO SALE sign rang up.

"Some carom shot, eh? Now stand back everybody while I do a little piecework."

Their tasks completed, the other hoods gathered around as Will went to work on the pyramid of bottles and glassware on the backbar. He fired from the hip like an old western gunfighter, and every shot blasted a bottle or a glass. Grinning delightedly Robbo began to whistle the "Anvil Chorus," and at once the rest of the gang chimed in. Will picked up the beat with his shooting iron.

Robbo was the last to leave Gisborne's establishment. In the foyer, he hesitated and muttered, "I can't help thinking I forgot something." He turned and looked back into the disaster area, uncertainty ruffling his brow. Then his features relaxed in a half-smile. "That's it!"

He walked back into the club and stared up at the huge crystal chandelier that hung in the middle of the room. Unholstering his gun, he drew a bead on the chandelier and emptied the magazine at it. There was the melodious sound of fine crystal splintering, then the chandelier shook, and a rumbling filled the empty room. Robbo sprinted for the door as a ton of metal and glass came crashing down.

It was almost three o'clock in the morning when

Robbo and the gang drove through the alleyway and parked behind their own club. Understandably, they were all in high spirits as they pranced through the back door into Robbo's office.

Robbo took off his coat and threw it across the back of a chair. He rubbed his hands together in smug satisfaction. "Gentlemen, this calls for a drink. Champagne. In fact everybody gets champagne on the house. Imported, too."

Will cocked his head toward the doorway and frowned. "Sounds kinda quiet out there. Must have been an early night."

"Well, it'll liven up now." Robbo strode to the door leading out into the club and flung it open. He froze, on the threshold, his eyeballs bulging. "JESUS CHRIST!"

The others flocked around him, peering across his shoulders curiously. Twelve pairs of lungs deflated simultaneously with a sound like a ruptured blimp.

"Oh no!" Six Second moaned. "Say it ain't so!"

Little John's voice was weary. "That answers your question, Will."

"What question?" Will asked in a dull tone.

"Before, when we passed Gisborne's car, you wondered where they were heading?"

In a trance Robbo walked stiff-legged into the club room. The pool tables were kindling wood. The gaming tables and slot machines were a mound

of rubble. Draperies, pictures, light fixtures had been ripped off the walls.

"It looks just like Gisborne's place," one of the hoods remarked in wonder.

"Very funny," Robbo said icily.

Little John dragged his feet over to the bar and surveyed the shambles of a couple of hundred bottles of bootleg liquor. He rested his elbows on the bar and buried his face in his hands.

"What a shameful waste! Ten thousand hangovers down the drain!"

Chapter Four

The next morning Robbo put everyone to work on "Operation Clean-up"—housemen, waitresses, and even his hoods. While this was going on, Robbo was conferring in his office with Will, Little John, and Chicago's foremost building contractor, Elihu Ricks. Ricks was a paunchy man with thin gray hair and rimless eyeglasses. His consternation magnified as Robbo outlined the rough plans for rehabilitating the club.

"Sir, I don't know what— What I mean is—" Ricks floundered. "The truth is, I have been a builder for thirty-eight years, and I have never heard of anything so fantastic as this."

Robbo grinned. "There's nothing new under the sun, Mister Ricks. They've been doing it in the Broadway theater for years. You've seen those revolving stages, so's they can change the sets in a few minutes."

Robbo's

"But a night club!" Ricks protested. "It's too much, really. I don't know if it can be done."

Robbo got out of the barber's chair and walked slowly across to the desk where Ricks was scratching notes on his clipboard. He leaned over the desk and spoke in a voice that was quiet but menacing. "Ricks . . . *you're* going to build it!"

The contractor looked around in confusion as Will and John closed in from either side, casually but equally menacing.

He laughed nervously. "Well, I can try. You realize what this is going to cost, don't you? Four hundred thousand—maybe more."

"You're hired," Robbo said.

"You don't want to look around? Get a competitive bid?"

"I don't think Mister Ricks gets the point," Little John offered. "This job is gotta be top secret."

"I wanted the best man," Robbo said, "and that's you, Ricks. You're the only one we're gonna talk to. And *you* ain't talking to anyone else. Is that clear?"

A strangled noise escaped Rick's throat. "But Mister-er-er Robbo? What about my architects, my foreman? My crew has got to know what they're doing! The blueprints—"

"No!" Robbo cut him off sharply. "Nobody sees any blueprints. Nobody knows what they're doing. You don't use your regular crew. You break the job up into a million parts. You hire a man for each

detail, and when his part of the job is done you let him go. Is that clear?"

Ricks knew when he was beaten. He slumped over the desk. "Yes, sir, it's clear."

"Good, then we got a deal. Listen—" Robbo broke off as the office phone jangled. He nodded to Will, who picked up the receiver. Robbo went on talking to Ricks. "How long is it going to take?"

Ricks frowned. "Oh, say about six months. Maybe seven."

"Let's say about three."

"Why, that's absolutely impossible!"

Robbo's eyes were hard as flint. "Three months."

Ricks started to open his mouth, then shut it with an expression of hopeless resignation.

Will held the mouthpiece of the phone against his chest and whispered to Robbo. "It's Gisborne. You wanna talk to him?"

"Do I!" Robbo snatched the phone away from him roughly. It was hard to keep his voice bland. "Robbo speaking. What's on your mind, Gisborne?"

The voice on the other end was jocular, so jocular it was apparent that Gisborne was on the verge of hysteria.

"Robbo old pal, what's new?"

"Nothing much. What's new with you, Guy?"

A catch in the voice. "Sorry I wasn't home when you called last night."

Robbo grimaced. "That's O.K. Long as you got my message."

"Likewise. You figuring on putting up anudder joint?"

"Starting tomorrow."

Gisborne cawed like a vulture. *"Don't use so many nails this time. Makes it harder to take apart."*

Robbo was bored. *"You finished?"*

A conciliating tone. *"Look Robbo, let bygones be bygones. We're both starting from scratch, how about we put up a real joint togedder?"*

"Thanks, Gisborne," Robbo said coldly. *"I'd sooner sleep with a rattlesnake."*

Gisborne's control left him, and he began to shout. *"You're stupid, Robbo! Plain stupid! I got you seven to one. You wouldn't bet on a horse wid them odds!"*

"The odds are improving. By the time my new club opens—"

"You won't be around! And that's a promise!"

"You never kept a promise in your life, Gisborne." Robbo slammed down the receiver on its hook and set the phone down on the desk. He smiled at Will and John. *"Gisborne wants we should be podners."*

"And now the war is on for real," Will said.

"Gisborne's no fool. He won't spring for a while. There's a lot of heat being put on the sheriff's office since Big Jim was hit," John said.

This talk of gang war brought beads of perspiration out on the contractor's forehead. Nervously, he said, *"Robbo . . . I—er—well, let's be frank. I'm*

going to be laying out a great deal of money for this job. And, well . . . you do have certain occupational hazards. . . .”

Robbo got the point. “John, give Mister Ricks fifty big ones for a deposit.”

Little John pulled out a fat wallet and began to count off thousand-dollar notes on one corner of the desk. He dropped the last one on the pile and tossed the stack in front of Ricks. In awe, and with some embarrassment, the contractor began to count them himself, in a manner that suggested he suspected the whole thing was a sleight-of-hand trick. People just don’t carry this kind of money around with them, or hand it out so casually!

Robbo grinned. “It’s all there, Ricks. And it’s real.” He turned to Will. “Pass the word to all the help—everybody stays on the payroll until we get the joint glued together. Ricks can start work—” He broke off abruptly, aware that neither Will nor John was paying any attention to him. Their eyes were fixed hypnotically on something behind him. Robbo did a quick about-face—and almost fell flat on his face! Framed in the doorway was the mysterious lovely who had put the single rose on Big Jim’s grave.

She stood there with one delicate gloved hand on the doorknob, one silken knee bent provocatively toward the other knee, a breathtaking vision in something pink and angora-soft that clung to the

contours of her body like her skin. Her smile disarmed Robbo.

"I should have knocked," she said in a voice that was uncommonly low for a woman. Most of the females of the gang's acquaintance affected the high-pitched whine of alley cats. The three hoods wore the childishly pathetic expressions of small boys with their noses pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Even Mister Ricks stopped counting his money.

John was the first to recover his composure. He moved toward the girl, smiling in his most charming fashion so as to hide the missing tooth on the upper left side of his mouth. "You never have to knock on my door, baby." He held out both hands to her.

But she ignored him and walked toward Robbo. "How are you, Robbo?" she asked in the warm way of an old friend.

Robbo blinked. "We *know* each other?"

"I know you," she said quixotically.

John made another effort. "And now you know me. My friends call me Little John. We met at the polo matches, remember? Meadowbrook, you're *right!*"

She never heard him. "Robbo, I'd like to talk to you alone."

Robbo was pleased with himself. "Sure, the boys were just leaving—weren't you, boys?"

John started to object. "I wasn't leaving!"

"Sure you were," Robbo said pleasantly. "The polo matches, remember? You're late now."

Reluctantly, Little John followed Will out of the door. As Ricks hurried after them, Robbo called to him, "Ricks, tomorrow!"

"Yes, sir." The builder closed the door behind him.

Robbo faced the girl uncertainly. "Well . . . Miss . . ."

"I'm Marian Stevens." She perched on a corner of his desk and crossed her legs. The short skirt crept up to the tops of her silk stockings. She seemed to enjoy the discomposure Robbo was obviously experiencing. In a leisurely way she took a thin gold cigarette case from her purse and extracted a long, thin cigarette of foreign brand. Robbo pulled out a book of matches and after three fumbling attempts managed to light it for her. She laughed softly, deep in her throat.

"It's not nice to keep you in suspense."

"That's O.K." Robbo recovered with a bold glance at her dimpled knees. "I'm enjoying the view."

"My name doesn't mean anything to you, Robbo?"

Robbo shook his head. "Marian Stevens. Not a thing. What were you doing at Big Jim's funeral?"

"No one had a better right to be there. Big Jim was my father."

Robbo could not have been more shaken up if Gisborne had dropped a bomb in his lap. His as-

tonishment was followed quickly by suspicion. "Wait a minute, lady. Big Jim never told me anything about a daughter. And I was as close to him as a son."

She turned a feline smile on him. "I guess you weren't as close to him as you thought."

"So where was he hiding you all these years?"

"Private schools. Foxcroft, Vassar, the Sorbonne."

Robbo shook his head in bewilderment, searching her face for some flaw that would betray her story. But instinct told him she was the genuine article. Bottled in bond. The association made him thirsty suddenly.

"I need a drink. Can I get you anything?"

"No thanks." She continued to talk as he went to the bar and poured himself three fingers of straight bourbon. "My mother died when I was born. For obvious reasons my father kept me out of his world. Built a completely different world for me. Stevens was my mother's name."

Robbo downed the drink, poured himself another, and walked back to the desk. "I liked Big Jim."

Her dark eyes were calculating. "I know you did. And he liked you. That's the reason I'm here."

His response was prompt. "Sure, anything you need. Money, contacts, just say the word."

"Just one thing, Robbo."

"Name it."

She ground out her cigarette viciously in the ash-tray beside her. "I want you to get the man who killed my father."

Someone *had* dropped a bomb in his lap. Robbo whistled through the gap in his front teeth. "Hey, you shouldn't talk like that. A classy dame like you."

Her voice was brittle and businesslike. "I'll pay you twenty-five thousand."

Robbo was becoming slightly annoyed. "I run a gambling joint. I hustle beer. I make my customers happy. I do not rent out guns."

"Thirty-five thousand."

He laughed without humor. "Sweetheart, I know you're shocked by what happened to your old man. I respect that in any kid. But when you go shopping for killers in this town, it's like walking in the jungle on a dark night."

"Do you know who did it, Robbo?"

He hesitated, then shrugged. "Everybody knows, anyway. It was Sheriff Glick who set him up."

This was no longer the soft, cuddly kitten Robbo had first envisioned when she had walked into the office. This was a dangerous tigress with baleful eyes and bared fangs.

"Fifty thousand," she said.

Robbo's patience ran out. "Look, Miss Stevens, stop acting like a spoiled rich kid and go back to your polo ponies and fox hunts."

She sneered at him. "And you said you liked my father!"

Robbo's eyes were as unwavering as her own. "The cemetery is full of guys I liked. I ain't rushing to join the club."

With a deep sigh, she eased herself off the desk, letting her skirt slide far up the firm whiteness of her thighs. Head down, she walked slowly to the door, her full hips undulating beneath the tight downy fabric. *Damn!* Robbo thought with longing. *There was a cuddly kitten inside the tigress!* He walked after her and placed a hand on her arm; the hand tingled.

"I didn't mean to blow up. I just don't want you to get that beautiful face pushed in. Look, how about having dinner with me tonight?"

Her smile was sly and enigmatic. "First things first, Robbo. Business before pleasure." Her smooth brow puckered. "You know, I think if I could get that sheriff business settled, you and I could become close friends. Even closer friends than you were with my father . . . Goodbye, Robbo."

Confounded and perplexed, Robbo stared after her as she picked her way daintily through the rubble that littered the floor of the club. Little John idled over and leaned against the doorjamb, following Robbo's entranced stare.

"So how was she?"

Robbo snorted. "You kidding? She'd claw you to death."

He turned away and walked back into the office, stopping underneath the portrait of Big Jim. He sighed. "Old pal, you ain't really dead. Only now you're wearing a skirt and high heels."

Chapter Five

Guy Gisborne was in a vile mood. Immediately after his unprofitable phone call to Robbo, he had called a meeting of his mobster lieutenants. The meeting was held, very deliberately, in the midst of the wreckage of the Full House Café. The hoods sat around on boxes, overturned slot machines, and other remnants of the gambling establishment. When he took the floor to speak, Gisborne made a dramatic picture against the backdrop of the smashed crystal chandelier. The air was heavy with smoke as the men puffed nervously on their big stogies.

Vermin Witkowski cleared his throat apologetically. "Guy, you got an ashtray around here someplace?"

Gisborne's throat swelled so that he resembled an outraged bullfrog. He kicked ankle-deep debris in Vermin's direction. "This is no time for jokes, goddammit!"

Vermin shrunk back in his seat and flicked his ashes on a pile of broken plaster.

Still burning inwardly, Gisborne raked the group with his barracuda smile. "Gentlemen, foist of all I wanna apologize for all this untidiness." His eyes found the sheriff's. "But it's all part of the sheriff's master plan how to break Robbo."

Glick protested indignantly. "Now, look here, Guy. Surely you're not suggesting that I am responsible for this . . . this. . . ." He gestured unhappily at the chaos around them.

Gisborne's voice was acid. "Perish the thought, Sheriff, old pal. Anybody can make a mistake. Only maybe a smart man like you has an idea how I'm gonna get two hundred and fifty grand to put the joint togedder again!"

The sheriff chewed on his cigar with agitation. "You know I haven't got that kind of money."

Gisborne rubbed his lantern jaw speculatively. "But you're collecting twenty-five per cent from our operation. In view of the emoigency how about cutting your piece to ten per cent?"

"Out of the question!" Glick said curtly. "My people won't stand for it."

Gisborne sighed. "I on'y asked, Sheriff."

Sheriff Glick got up stiffly. "I'm a busy man, Guy. Am I going to be needed here any longer?"

With the geniality of a spider enfolding a fly, Gisborne went over to the sheriff and put an arm

around his shoulders. "No, pal, you are no longer needed around here."

Surreptitious smiles flitted across the faces of the other mobsters. Deputy Sheriff Crocker made a move to rise too, but Gisborne waved him back down on his stool.

"Crocker, you was going to tell me about that new insurance policy, remember?"

Glick glanced at his deputy with suspicion. "Crocker, don't tell me you're selling insurance? You know that kind of thing is against departmental rules."

Crocker tittered uneasily. "No, nothing like that, Sheriff. It's my wife's brother."

Glick shook his head in bewilderment. "Insurance! What company would take on a risk like Guy Gisborne?"

Gisborne grinned smugly through his cigar smoke. "Never can tell, Sheriff. Never can tell."

"Well . . . make it back as fast as you can, Crocker." Sheriff Glick picked up his hat and swaggered to the door. "See you, Guy."

There followed a long uncomfortable silence, finally broken by Gisborne. "Gentlemen, I called this meeting to discuss the accident insurance of our organization. Not only is the premium too high—fifty per cent—but the state of these surroundings make it perfectly clear to me that we ain't getting the pertection we're paying for. . . . I was thinking

that maybe we ought to liquidate the deal we have with Sheriff Glick?"

"How 'bout liquidating Sheriff Glick?" Blue Jaw growled.

"I was coming to that." Gisborne turned to Crocker. "If a new insurance agent was to take over our policy, how much you figure his premium would be to cover us?"

"Ten per cent," the deputy said without hesitation.

Gisborne smiled benevolently upon him. "That's fair enough for me. Now we can get on to the next business of the meeting. The floor is now open for ways and means to liquidate the old partnership."

"The old partner!" Blue Jaw maintained.

Tomatoes spoke up eagerly. "How about we pack 'im in lime?"

Gisborne shook his head. "Not reliable. Anybody wears a badge, we can't take no chances of 'em finding evidence."

Blue Jaw preferred the tried and true method. "Stuff his pocket with sinkers and make a deposit in Lake Michigan. That's how we got rid of my brudder-in-law, and they still don't know what happened to him."

"Still risky," Gisborne reminded him. "Just last year some of the boys dumped Sloppy Julius into the lake. And you 'member what happened? One day he came riding into port on the high tide like an ocean liner."

Vermin raised his hand. "I got a suggestion."
Gisborne frowned. "What?"

"I suggest we open a window. This smoke is—"
Gisborne clapped one hand to his head and groaned. "Gowan, open a window, Vermin! Get outta here!" He nodded to Liver Jackson who was waving his hand impatiently.

"I gotta uncle who's a night watchman in a steel mill in Gary, Indiana. How 'bout we insoit the victim in a boiler, bury it in a pile of scrap, and it gets melted down in a blast furnace. Next thing, you know, the sheriff is a chassis for a Buick."

"That's good, Liver," Gisborne praised him. "Only how do we make sure that boiler gets to Gary, Indiana?"

Liver was momentarily perplexed. "Well . . . we could ship it by Railway Express. We could even insure it!"

Gisborne winced. "You just lost your gold star, pal. Keep thinking, boys."

"I got it!" a hood who was called Twitch shouted. "I gotta friend who's a stonemason. His specialty is cornerstones. Right now, he's got three in the woiks. One for the Knights of Pythias . . . one for a bridge . . . one for the new police station!"

All attention was focused on Twitch. Even Gisborne was intrigued. "Keep talking, Twitch."

"I read onct that they stash things away in them cornerstones for safekeeping. Maybe a hundred years later, new people will find 'em. . . ."

Gisborne's imagination was soaring now. "Keep talking, baby. Keep talking. . . . Just imagine, the sheriff tucked away in the corner of a police station!"

Twitch faltered. "Only thing is, Glick stretches out to over six feet. Them cornerstones can't be any bigger'n three feet on a side."

The mobsters faces mirrored acute disappointment. Then Soup Meat saved the day. "So what! So we fold 'im in half!"

An audible sigh of relief could be heard. Gisborne's smile had never been toothier. "Wunnerful, just wunnerful. And kind of sentimental. Like burying the sanitation commissioner in the city dump." A sly expression crept over his face. "Another thing—this may be just what we need to bring Robbo and his boys back into the bosom of our happy family."

Blue Jaw was skeptical. "You're gonna tell Robbo?"

"You bet I'm gonna tell 'im!" Gisborne dry-washed his hands, gloating over this inspiration. "After all, Big Jim was his pal. We bump the sheriff, Robbo's got no cause to be burned up at me no more."

Christmas passed, and a bright new year dawned. Occupied with rebuilding their night clubs, Gisborne and Robbo declared an armed truce. Besides, Sheriff Glick had disappeared mysteriously on New

Year's Eve, and it would have been in the worst possible taste to harass his successor Alvin Crocker with a gang war while he was whipping his own organization into shape. It was a time of welcome tranquillity for the city of Chicago.

As it happened, the new police station opened for business before either Gisborne's or Robbo's new club. There was a gala dedication ceremony attended by two score of Chicago's most influential citizens. Considering the warm and intimate relationship between the underworld and the department, it was only appropriate that the honored seats were reserved for the VIPs of the mob. Guy Gisborne and his coterie of seven hoods were in the front row, alongside the bandstand.

An enormous block of poured concrete dangled on steel cables, suspended from the long neck of a crane, just above the sidewalk at the corner of the police station. Chiseled in one face was the inscription: CHICAGO—1929. Eying it with bored impatience were the mayor and the police commissioner, both decked out in swallowtails and striped trousers. Guy Gisborne turned in his chair every time another car pulled up at the curb, then glanced anxiously at the five vacant seats in the front row.

"I wouldn't want Robbo to miss this," he muttered.

To his relief, just as the cornerstone was lowered into place, a big black limousine glided to the curb and Robbo and his hoods climbed out. Gisborne

stood up and beckoned to them, calling in a stage whisper, "Psst, over here. I saved your seats."

"Thanks," Robbo said coolly. He ignored Gisborne's outstretched hand and sat down.

Shrugging off the slight, Gisborne sat down beside him. "Glad you could make it, Robbo."

"I wouldn't have missed it for the World Series."

Gisborne turned his barracuda smile on the cornerstone. "I think the sheriff is gonna be very happy here."

Robbo lit a cigarette. "Couldn't you get him a bigger suite?"

Gisborne giggled. "We coulda had the one at the Knights of Pythias, but he wasn't a member."

Further conversation was drowned out as the band began to play "Nearer My God to Thee."

After three choruses the dissonance ceased, and the mayor gave a short speech extolling the virtues of the Chicago Police Department. At last he beamed at the commissioner.

". . . And now, ladies and gentlemen, may I present to you the chief of law enforcement in this great and wonderful city, Commissioner Oswald C. Brockton!"

The commissioner was a tall, erect, distinguished-looking man with clear, honest gray eyes.

"He used to be Legs Diamond's lawyer," Gisborne whispered to Robbo.

"Thank you, friends," the commissioner began.

"It is a singular honor to be chosen to dedicate this new home of the Chicago Police Department, this temple of justice as it were. But the sense of joy and pride I feel is tarnished somewhat by the absence of one who was a symbol of law and order and integrity, a pillar of law enforcement and fair play, one of Chicago's noblest sons." He paused dramatically and placed one hand on the new cornerstone. "Truly, Sheriff Morton Glick was the cornerstone of the city's police department. . . ."

There was a great deal of stifled hilarity among the hoods in the first row.

The commissioner continued. "City, state, and federal investigators have been working around the clock on the case, but as yet not a single clue has turned up to explain the mysterious disappearance of Sheriff Glick. I fear we must face up to the inevitable conclusion that the good sheriff was a victim of foul play. . . ."

"He was a foul ball all the way," Gisborne muttered.

". . . He was a man of principle," said the commissioner, "a man of determination. A man who would not bend . . ."

"We didn't have no trouble bending 'im," Blue Jaw leered.

By the time the ceremony was over and the workmen were preparing to mortar the stone in place permanently, Robbo and his boys were yawn-

ing. There was polite clapping when the mayor and the commissioner left, then the band swung into action again with "There'll Be a Hot Time in Old Town Tonight."

After the party broke up, Gisborne followed Robbo to his car. "I squared the books on Big Jim, Robbo, but I didn't hear you say t'anks."

Robbo looked at him scornfully. "*T'anks!*"

Gisborne reddened. "I'm putting it on the line wit' you now, Robbo. If you don't come in, I'm gonna have to hit you!"

Robbo shrugged philosophically. "If you gotta hit, you gotta hit."

Gisborne seemed to be in genuine pain. "I like you, kid, but your behavior is stirrin' up the other boys. It ain't right that they should pay for pertec-tion while you won't kick in a dime."

"I understand," Robbo said as he climbed into the front seat of the limousine.

"No hard feelings, pal." Gisborne bent over and leaned on the frame of the door.

"Forget it." Robbo turned to Little John who was driving. "I feel like a ride. Let's go back to the club by way of Maple. Cut through Lincoln Park, around the zoo."

Gisborne's eyes opened wide, and he bared his large white teeth. "T'anks, pal. Have an enjoyable ride."

Will and Six Second, in the back seat, peered in-

tently out the rear window as the car glided away from the curb.

"Did you notice that carload of gorillas parked across the street?" Will asked loudly. "Gisborne is going over to talk to 'em."

"I thought I recognized some of his hatchet men," Robbo said mildly.

Six Second coughed. "Don't think I'm criticizing, boss, but was it smart to tell Gisborne we was going through the park? I mean . . ."

Robbo laughed. "I wanted to make sure those goons didn't lose us, Six."

"Huh?" The hood's jaw sagged.

"Well, they didn't," Will said grimly. "Here they come. Big black job looks like an armored tank."

As John turned into the park, Robbo cautioned him. "Not too much gas, baby. Those armored jobs aren't the fastest."

Six Second blinked in consternation. "I don't know what this is all about, but—" He reached down on the floor and came up with a Thompson submachine gun.

"Put it back, Six," Robbo said gently.

"Yer kidding!"

"You heard me."

Six Second shrugged and dropped the weapon. "And I always figured on dying with me boots on."

Robbo studied the pursuing car in the rear-view mirror. "What are we doing, John?"

"Sixty."

Robbo nodded. "Start cutting her back when we get on that deserted stretch of road behind the zoo."

John eased up on the accelerator at the appropriate time, and now the clumsy black car closed the gap swiftly. Will was as confused as Six Second.

"Boss," he pleaded, "we ain't just gonna let 'em hit us without a fight?"

"Let me know when you can see the whites of their eyes." Robbo glanced at the speedometer. It read 40 mph. "Slower," he told John, "and stay in the middle of the road."

Six Second groaned. "I been in faster funerals than this."

"We're going to a funeral," Will said laconically. "Our own."

"Stay loose, pal. Stay loose," Robbo said gaily.

John began to hum the funeral march. "Dum, dum, da dum . . . da, da, da, da, da, da, dum. . ."

Less than thirty yards separated the two cars now, and the rear car was clearing the decks for action. Will, at his lookout post at the rear window, choked. "They're loaded for bear. Shotguns and Tommy guns. We don't stand a chance!"

Robbo's eyes were glued to the mirror as he snapped out directions to the driver. "Little left . . . that's it . . . easy on the gas . . . right on target . . . here she blows!"

With a quick movement he reached underneath the dash and tripped a concealed lever. There was the silent whirring of an electric motor.

In the pursuing car, Gisborne's hoods, with their weapons cocked and ready, stared curiously as a trap door opened up in the trunk of Robbo's limousine. Nestling snugly in the small compartment thus revealed was a metal keg.

"What the hell!" growled the driver. "Robbo's gonna soive beer at his own wake!"

To their further amazement a metal chute accordioned out of the trunk at the bottom of the compartment and was lowered to road level by folding side braces. At this point a spring lever at the back of the compartment nudged the keg out of the compartment onto the chute. It slid down to the road with a gentle bump and rolled back into the path of the oncoming car. Gisborne's wide-eyed hoods caught a quick glimpse of it before it disappeared beneath the front bumper. And that was all any of them ever knew again.

Their faces pressed against the rear window of Robbo's car, Six Second and Will watched in wonder as the second car was pulverized in a sheet of flame and smoke. The force of the explosion hit their own car like a tornado, and John had to fight the wheel for control. They looked back in awe as the smoke cleared, but the road was empty. Far in the distance Will's keen eyes made out a wheel arcing lazily through the air like a discus.

"Jesus!" he said in awe. "A car with depth bombs."

Robbo polished his nails on his lapel and said

with modest pride, "You know how it is these days, Will. You buy a car and they load you up with all kinds of extras."

John was singing as they exited from the park, "*Any boy who loves his mother . . .*"

Chapter Six

Not long after Sheriff Glick's interment, Robbo received a telephone call from Marian Stevens.

"I'm ready for that date we discussed."

"Great," Robbo said. "What time do I pick you up?"

Her voice dropped an octave, low and intimate. "I thought it would be cozy if we stayed right here at my place. Just a small candlelight dinner with champagne."

Robbo inhaled loudly. "Say, that'll be great. Where is your flat, anyway?"

She laughed. "I have the penthouse on top of the King's Arms. Actually it's one of Daddy's real estate investments."

Robbo was still bemused after he had hung up. It was hard to imagine Big Jim as landlord of the King's Arms, one of the ritziest lakeside apartment houses in Chicago. The more you thought you knew somebody, he decided, the less about them you

really knew. Well, the name was appropriate. Big Jim had been a king, all right.

Dinner at Marian's was not the cozy arrangement Robbo had been envisioning. They sat at opposite ends of a table long enough to have accommodated a wedding party. Robbo found himself shouting and craning his neck to right and left to get a glimpse of his partner through the forest of flowers and candles that adorned the table. Then there was the butler, a muscled Adonis with a face that bore the scars of innumerable battles. Robbo recognized him vaguely as a one-time boxer whom Big Jim had owned a piece of, years before. He spoke precise, wooden English—diction lessons, no doubt—and performed his duties with practiced finesse. And he hovered over Marian like a harem guard.

When they had finished eating, Marian told him, "You may serve coffee and brandy in the parlor. After the houseboy clears up the dishes, you can both take the night off."

He bowed stiffly from the waist. "Yes, ma'am."

Robbo hurried around the table to hold her chair as she rose. He took a studied bird's-eye look into the low V neckline of her gown. No brassiere, that was for sure.

She smiled up at him. "It's not polite to stare, Robbo."

Robbo felt his face flush, but countered easily. "First-class merchandise is designed to be looked at."

"How sweet."

Robbo followed her down into the sunken living room, mesmerized by the fluid roll of her hips under the tight silk. "I still can't figure it. You and Big Jim out of the same stable."

"You don't believe I'm his daughter, do you? Then who am I?"

"I dunno. You rich society gals get some queer notions."

She stooped over the cocktail table and took a cigarette from a silver chalice, then turned to face him with a feline grin. "There's nothing queer about me, Robbo." The innuendo was unmistakable.

Robbo picked up an elaborate table lighted and lit her cigarette. "Some of my boys figure you might be a decoy to set me up for Gisborne."

Her eyes slitted in the cigarette smoke. "Want to frisk me?"

Robbo's stern face cracked in a guilty smile. "The idea has occurred to me."

The butler served the tray with the silver demitasse cups and the crystal snifters of aromatic brandy. He bowed again. "Good night, madam. Good night, sir."

Robbo sank down on a brocaded sofa and looked around the huge room. It had the look of an illustration in a decorator's style book. The lavishness of the apartment made him uncomfortable. Nervously he lit a cigarette and took a long swig of the brandy.

Marian was pacing restlessly around the couch, her eyes intent on him, the way a cat stalks a bird.

"I understand the matter of the sheriff has been squared away," she said finally.

"So I hear." Robbo was noncommittal.

"Sort of leaves things up for grabs, doesn't it?"

"Guy Gisborne's grabbed with both hands."

"Cut off his arms!"

Robbo watched her curiously as she strolled over to a wall switch and tapped the button. The chandelier blacked out. She walked across the room to a table set in an immense bay window overlooking the lake.

"I don't know if he ever told you, Robbo, but Big Jim was going to retire. He wanted you to follow in his footsteps."

Robbo's voice was flat. "Considering where Big Jim finally went, that's very discouraging."

She stood at the window, staring out into the darkness for a moment. Then there was another *click*, and the Chinese lamp in the bay window went out. She turned and headed for a pole lamp that illuminated the steps leading up to the foyer.

"You wouldn't be so careless as to let anyone throw you a birthday party, would you, Robbo?"

Robbo snorted. "Not unless I had the gun concession."

She switched off the second light and walked back toward the couch, breasts thrust out, hips undulating in sensual rhythm. Her eyes were heavy-lidded

and smoky. Robbo was aware of the slow arc of desire. An alarm rang somewhere in his brain. He sat up straight and took a deep breath. She coiled up beside him on the couch, snakelike. The tip of her pink tongue caressed her full lips.

"Time for your big move, Robbo," she said huskily. "Make it and you can go all the way."

Robbo, badly confused, followed her gaze to the remaining lamp in the room, burning on the end table beside the couch. Warily he asked her, "Are we still talking about taking over the mob?"

"We're talking about life, Robbo. A man sees something he wants, and he reaches out and takes it." She moved closer to him, making no move to pull down the skirt that had crept far up on her thighs. Her breasts were half out of the gown's flimsy bodice.

Involuntarily Robbo's left hand moved to the light switch. And hesitated. His voice was brittle. "Why do I have the feeling I'm being maneuvered into something?"

She laughed softly, and he felt her warm breath on his cheek. "Dont be silly. I only want to help you, Robbo. It won't be easy to take over this town. But a man like you can do it." She held up her parted lips invitingly. "I want to be part of that success. Share it with you, darling."

"Comes the revelation!" Robbo's face hardened, and gently but decisively he put his hands on her bare shoulders and pushed her away from him.

"Sorry, baby, but I like to lead when I dance. And my feet hurt tonight." He stood up and started for the foyer. "It's been a lovely evening, Miss Stevens."

"Robbo, wait!" She ran after him and blocked his way in the foyer. "I almost forgot—Daddy wanted you to have this." She hurried into the foyer and rummaged in the top drawer of a hand-carved commode that stood against one wall. "It isn't much, but he was fond of it for sentimental reasons."

Robbo blinked in surprise as she handed him a small cigarette box made of hammered silver. "Well . . . that was thoughtful of Big Jim. Thanks." He accepted it and examined it idly. Automatically, his fingers went to the catch and opened the lid. His eyebrows lifted. "Hey, the thing is loaded! You shouldn't be so careless with your money." He removed a roll of greenbacks from the case and held them out to her.

Marian shook her head, an impish smile making her appear very young and girlish. "No, that belongs to you, Robbo."

"Me! How come?"

"Our arrangement. Fifty thousand to dispose of the sheriff."

His anger was mounting. Roughly, he shoved the bills and the cigarette box back into her hands. "I told you before—I'm not in that racket."

She laughed. "If you're afraid I can't afford it, forget it. Big Jim left me 'well heeled,' as you boys put it."

His lips curled back from his teeth in disdain. "Us boys have a name for dames like you, too, only I'm too much of a gentleman to say it in the presence of a *lady*."

The unmistakable inflection he gave the last word was not lost on her. But she merely smiled sweetly at him. "Aren't you even going to kiss me good night?"

Solemnly he cupped one hand beneath her chin and tilted up her face. Chastely he touched his lips to her forehead. "Sorry, baby, but this season we're not going in for passionate pink hoods." She was still smiling, with effort, when he shut the door quietly behind him.

It was almost noon when Six Second barged into the club's office, where Will and Little John were playing two-handed pinochle.

"Boss not in yet?"

John winked. "Had a big night with that Stevens dame. Robbo's a growing boy and he needs his sleep."

Six grunted and put down Big Jim's silver cigarette box on the desk blotter. "Messenger just left this for him. I t'ought it might be a bomb, so I took it out in the alley and opened it with a ten-foot pole."

Will laughed. "No bomb?"

"It's loaded, all right," Six said.

John put down his cards and flipped back the lid of the silver box. His eyes flared at the sight of the greenbacks stacked to the lip of the case. "Jesus Chi-ris!" He picked up a small white card lying on top of the money and read, "*Thanks for taking care of everything. Marian.*" There was a marked note of respect in John's voice. "Gentlemen, our boss is a real mechanic. One night he spends with a broad and she is so grateful that she sends him a pile of G-notes."

Will frowned. "Maybe she's buying a piece of the action?"

"Naw," Six scoffed. "Robbo don't go for no partners. Listen, the goil is grateful, like John said. I used to go with a dame who was a health-food nut. Iffen I gave her a real good time, she would send me a bucket of yogurt." 1920s

John and Will stared at him incredulously. Just then Robbo came in briskly and started to remove his coat. "It's a beautiful morning, gentlemen," he said gaily.

"Must have been a good night too, eh?" John answered.

Robbo looked puzzled as he became aware of the smirks on the faces of his three friends. "What's that supposed to—" He bit off the question as he caught sight of the open cigarette box on his desk. "Now where the hell . . ." He strode across to the desk angrily.

John picked the stack of bills out of the box and fanned them like a deck of cards. "Fifty grand and a thank-you note." He flashed a wicked smile. "Boss, Uncle Sam needs men like you for the indoor olympics."

"Drop dead!" Robbo was scowling furiously. "That stupid dame thinks *I* hit the sheriff."

John shrugged. "So, why argue?"

Robbo pounded with both fists on the desk. "Get it out of my sight! Now!"

John recoiled, almost upsetting the swivel chair. "Take it easy, boy!"

"Take it back!"

"But it smells so good," John pleaded.

Robbo snapped his fingers at Will. "You take charge, personally, Will. See Miss Stevens gets her money back."

Reluctantly, John handed over the bills to Will who looked at them wistfully. "Gee, boss, if she's as stubborn as you say, won't she send it back to you again?"

Robbo shook a cigarette out of a pack and lit it. "Yeah . . . you're probably right. O.K., dump it."

John, Will, and Six Second all grinned broadly in relief. "You want I should spread it out among the boys?"

"Did I say that?" Robbo snapped. "That would be the same as me keeping it. Give it to a worthy charity. Orphans or something . . . Yeah, give it to the orphans' home."

John tipped the lid of the box shut. "What about this? You gonna keep it?"

Robbo picked it up and turned it over and over in his hands. His eyes were sentimental. "Yeah . . . I'll keep the box. It was Big Jim's."

Chapter Seven

In one week's time Robbo's name was splashed across the front page of every newspaper in Chicago; his charity even made headlines in New York and San Francisco.

"ROBIN HOOD IN CHICAGO!" Will read from one paper. He laid it aside and took another from the mountain of newspapers on Robbo's desk. "Get this one, boys—UNDERWORLD LEADER DONATES FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS TO BLESSED SHELTER ORPHANS' HOME!"

Robbo was slumped gloomily in the barber's chair while Six Second shaved him. "That's enough already. One thing you don't need in our business is front-page publicity." He winced as a newsboy's raucous voice drifted in through the open window:

"Extry! Extry! Read all about it! Gangster takes from the rich to give to the poor. . . ."

Robbo bounced up in the chair. "Shut that damned window!"

Will leaped to comply.

Six wiped sweat off his forehead. "Stop jerking around like that, boss. I nearly cut your throat."

Robbo was sullen. "That Stevens dame beat you to it."

A strong-arm boy with the flat dull face and build of an ape sat on a chair by the door with a submachine gun resting across his lap. "Say, what is a Robin Hood, anyway?"

John looked at him blandly. "A robin is a bird. So I guess it's a hood who steals birds."

The ape's eyes were round. "No kidding? What's anybody want with a hot canary?"

Robbo laughed. "He's ribbing you, Fluke. Robin Hood was an old-time Englishman who ran around in long green underwear. Had an operation going for him in some forest."

Will got into the act. "Was he the one they used to show in picture books wearing a coonskin cap?"

"You got it wrong," John said authoritatively. "It was Sir Walter Raleigh wore a coonskin cap."

"Naw, you're all fouled up," Will maintained. "Sir Walter Raleigh was the guy who threw his coat over a mud puddle so this naked blonde on a white horse wouldn't get her feet wet."

Fluke was perplexed. "If she was on a horse, how could she get her feet wet?"

"Deep puddle," Will said.

Fluke scratched his head. "Funny, I allus t'ought

the guy in the coonskin cap was Dan'l Boone. 'Course, I never did get past the fourth grade."

"Turn on the radio, Six," Robbo ordered. "The news is on. I heard some hotshot pilot flew from New York to Los Angeles in fifty-eight hours."

Six switched on the small radio on the bar and fiddled with the dial. "You want I should put on H. V. Kaltenborn?"

"Anything."

The golden voice of radio's most popular commentator issued forth from the loudspeaker:

". . . By his act he has captured the heart of the nation, just as the original Robin Hood captured the heart of merry old England in the fourteenth century. . . . Our modern Robin Hood employs somewhat different methods than his predecessor. Instead of bows and arrows, *his* Merry Men carry submachine guns. Instead of stealing outright from his rich victims, he picks their pockets at his gambling tables and caters to their taste for bootleg hootch. But in giving so munificently to the Orphans' Home, Robbo has acted in the highest tradition of the famed English outlaw. All the world loves a scoundrel, and its latest hero is . . ."

Robbo bounced out of the barber's chair, stomped to the bar, and turned the radio off. Poor Six dropped the straight razor and shoved a bloody finger into his mouth.

"Boss! Now you made me cut myself."

"Sorry, Six." Robbo dropped back into the chair limply.

John ambled over to the bar and poured himself a shot of scotch. "Boss, how far do you figure to push this Robin Hood kick?"

"I'm not doing any pushing. I must have been out of my mind in the first place."

Will was not so certain. "It's sure good publicity for the club, with opening night only a couple of days off."

Robbo looked worried. "Too good. Gisborne's gonna think I planned it this way. He's gonna put the squeeze on Crocker to hit me."

John strolled over to him, swirling the amber liquid around in the tumbler. "The sooner the better. I'm anxious to see if your Rube Goldberg invention is going to work."

Robbo seemed more confident suddenly. "It'll work, don't you worry about that."

Will moved some of the newspapers on the desk, revealing an imposing pile of letters underneath. "You are now Number One on every sucker list in the country. You want me to burn this chiseler mail, boss?"

"Do anything you—" He hesitated, then a little annoyed with himself, he said, "Read me a couple of them."

Will jerked his head and slit open an envelope. "This one's from the Miami Home for the Aged.

They'd like you to donate a fast ten grand for a basketball court."

John opened another and began to chuckle. "The Home for Wayward Girls. Now that's one I ought to donate to!"

Will shook his head. "Here's another from a widow with fourteen kids."

Robbo cut them off impatiently. "What the hell! Send them each a couple of hundred."

The hoods all gathered around the barber chair, their faces reflecting anxiety. "Boss," John said gently, "you can't hand out money to anybody who writes you. You'll be broke in one week."

Robbo had to accept that, but he was not satisfied. "I wish there was a way to check out which ones are crooked and which ones are on the level."

"Well, there ain't," John told him.

There was a knock on the door. The ape named Fluke flipped off the safety of his Tommy gun before he answered it. He spoke in low tones to another hood outside the door, then turned to Robbo. "There's a guy outside wants to talk wit' you, boss. Name of Allen Dale."

Robbo shrugged. "Frisk him and send him in."

The hoods gawked in disbelief as the visitor came timidly into the room, a battered bowler held on top of his small pot belly. He was a thin, hunched, frail figure with the air of a stray dog who has been kicked and beaten habitually. His clothing, cheap and threadbare as it was, was spotlessly clean, and



Robbo (alias Frank Sinatra)

Big Jim (alias Edward G. Robinson)





Will (alias Sammy Davis, Jr.)



Little John (alias Dean Martin)



Allen A. Dale (alias Bing Crosby)



Guy Gisborne (alias Peter Falk)

"Gentlemen, as Sheriff, I'm obliged to
keep law and order in this town.
It ain't easy with everybody trying to
knock everybody else apart."



Murnon (alias
Barbara Rush)







"And don't ever take that badge off, Sheriff.
'Cause you'll never live to pin it back on again!"



"Ladies and gentlemen, the joint's closing
down fer alterations. If everybody leaves
quietly, nobody's gonna get hurt..."



"I see we had company. Dis meetin' is to see if you guys got a plan on how I'm gonna get two hundred and fifty grand to put dis joint togedder again."



"What a waste. Ten thousand
hangovers down the drain!"

"You mean—you want to adopt me, sir? Gee, I'd be a real hood!"



"I'd enjoy having dinner with a lady, but
I'm not interested in pretty pink hoods!"





"Brudders, if dere's one
ting we got, we got *Style!*"



"Robin Hood is a good, good, good hood!"

even the much-soled shoes were polished. Weak eyes peered out from behind pince-nez spectacles.

"Now they're knocking at your door, Robbo," John said.

"At least you can tell the poor bastard is for real. Give him a couple of C-notes."

"No, no, sir!" the little man squeaked. "You do not understand. My humble apologies for this unwarranted intrusion, but it is not my purpose to petition or solicit."

"Must be a foreigner," Fluke mumbled. "That sure ain't American he's talking."

The little man drew himself up to his full height. "Permit me to introduce myself, gentlemen. I am Allen A. Dale, the secretary in residence at the Blessed Shelter Orphans' Home. I was so overwhelmed by your munificent gesture that I have embarked upon a personal crusade to spread the word of your generosity far and wide across the land."

Robbo fixed him with a penetrating gaze. "What-ta you mean, 'spread the word'?"

Dale smiled with quiet pride. "Simply, that it was I who gave the story of your donation to the communications media. The newspapers, radio . . . but I had no idea the reaction would be this tremendous." He backed up in alarm as Will came at him with a blackjack.

"Don't worry, boss, I'll take care of him," Will said.

"Will! No!" Robbo snapped.

Dale's eyes were big and scared behind his thick lenses. "Have I offended you in some manner, sir?"

Robbo was curious. "Was it you who cooked up this Robin Hood jazz?"

"Yes, sir. Robin Hood is the most beloved rogue in all of literature. He was handsome, gallant, courageous, compassionate, and—"

"You think *I'm* like him?" Robbo asked, surprised.

"Every bit of it, sir. You even look like Robin Hood."

"Well, what do you know!" Robbo looked around at his hoods with a self-conscious grin. He was patently flattered. "Give Mister Dale a drink, Will."

Dale held up his hands in horror. "Heaven forbid! I don't imbibe."

"Your sex life is your own business, buddy," John drawled. "The boss only asked you to have a drink."

"It's not permitted at the Orphans' Home. I haven't tasted alcohol in my entire life. From the day I was abandoned at the Home by my faithless mother, deposited on the doorstep in a suit of Doctor Denton pajamas on a snowy morn in January, the superiors made it their business to instill in me a loathing for intoxicants."

"You mean to say you're an orphan, too?" John demanded incredulously.

Dale's head drooped in secret shame. "I have

been up for adoption for forty years. While I am waiting, I am doing secretarial work for the Home."

Robbo and the hoods were sympathetic. "That's awful," Six Second said. "Waiting for forty years!"

Even Fluke was touched. "Poisonally, I think you ain't gonna make it pal. Who wants to adopt a kid what's older than his old man?"

Robbo looked at the strange little man thoughtfully. "Secretarial work, hmmm. Say, how would you like to move in here with us, Mister Dale?"

The middle-aged orphan was thunderstruck. "You mean . . . you want to adopt me?"

Robbo blushed. "Don't be silly. I was thinking we could use a good hand to take care of the office work, what with the new club opening and all *that*." He indicated the mail on the desk. "You know, the more I think about it, the better I like your Robin Hood gimmick. I think I'll play along with it for a while. On a smaller scale than that fifty-grand deal, though. My name is Robbo—not Rockefeller."

Dale giggled happily. "Robin Hood—that's your name! Sir, I will be more than a secretary to you. I will be your press agent. I will make you a legend in your own time."

Robbo crossed his legs and leaned back in the barber's chair, his eyes focused off in the distance. "John, put Al here down for a C-note a week—no, make it one-fifty."

Beaming, Allen A. Dale hurried to the barber's

chair and wrung Robbo's hand. "God bless you, sir. You won't regret this, I promise you." He closed his eyes and shuddered ecstatically. "Gee . . . I'm—one of Robin's hoods!"

It wasn't long before Allen A. Dale had earned the respect of Robbo's entire organization. Even Will, who was suspicious and doubting by nature, was won over. The day before the grand opening of the club, he came bounding into Robbo's office.

"Boss, you won't believe it until you see it. C'mon—I wanna take you for a ride."

Robbo grinned wryly. "You haven't switched over to Gisborne's team have you, pal?"

Will laughed. "A pleasure ride. Herbert Hoover should have a press agent like Al. C'mon!"

Robbo slipped into his coat, and they left by way of the back door. Will chauffeured them down to Chicago's skid row.

Robbo surveyed the scenery with distaste. "I don't know which looks crummier, the people or the buildings."

When they were still a block away, one structure stood out in striking contrast to its seamy surroundings. The roof was freshly tarred; the façade was bright with new paint. An impressive sign, hand-lettered in huge red Old English characters, proclaimed: YE OLDE ROBIN HOOD FOUNDATION—*Free Soup*. From the front door a line of assorted human

derelicts trailed off down the block and around the corner.

They drove past slowly. Robbo saw a fat jolly chef in a green, three-cornered cap sporting a long red feather ladling steaming broth into generous bowls inside the plate-glass window.

"That really is something," he said delightedly.

"You ain't seen nothing yet," Will told him.

They motored across town to the lakeside tenement district. Halfway down a block of attached cold-water flats, there was a building painted bright red and green. A cluster of women mobbed the sidewalk in front of the entrance, carrying or wheeling squalling infants. Robbo read the sign over the doorway: YE OLDE ROBIN HOOD FOUNDATION—*Free Clinic for Babies*.

Robbo grinned. "I think I'll run for sheriff in the next election."

Will shook his head. "You might win. Right now you are one popular man in this town."

Robbo relaxed and lit a cigarette. "Well, what's the next stop?"

"Surprise," Will said mysteriously.

They drove to what had once been a fashionable residential section on the edge of the city. Now most of the huge, ancient dwellings had a dull and ramshackle appearance. Many had been converted into boardinghouses. On one large plot of land, surrounded by a rusty iron picket fence, squatted a *once* stately three-story Georgian mansion. The

paint had peeled off in spots down to the raw wood. The roof sagged like a sway-backed mare. And the spacious lawn was infested by knee-high weeds.

Robbo was indignant as he studied the sign over the gate: BLESSED SHELTER ORPHANS' HOME.

"Hey," he exclaimed, "what have they been doing with the fifty grand I gave 'em? This joint reminds me of a reform school I once was in. Remind me to ask Al about that."

Will turned the limousine into the gate and eased it along the circular drive. When they came abreast of a rickety open porch Robbo recognized Allen A. Dale with a platoon of boys ranging in age from about eight to fifteen. He began to laugh.

"Where did he dig up those crazy outfits?"

All of the orphans—including Allen Dale—were clad in tight-fitting Robin Hood costumes, bright green, with a bow and a quiver of arrows slung over one shoulder. They wore the distinctive feathered hats cocked jauntily on one side of the head.

As Will and Robbo got out of the car and approached the steps, Allen Dale made like a town crier in his high falsetto voice: "Hear ye, hear ye, Merry Men of Robin Hood. Bold, fearless, courageous, dedicated warriors to the cause of right and truth. Hail to our noble chieftain!" He made an expansive flourish in Robbo's direction.

Robbo was self-conscious. "This is too much," he whispered to Will.

One of the boys evidently agreed with him, for

unexpectedly there was a loud, ripe raspberry from the ranks of junior hoods. Allen Dale was aghast. Angrily he pushed through the first two rows of boys and dragged a tall, gangly youth out of the formation. The lad was a half-head taller than him.

"I don't like your attitude, Jud," he said in a quivering voice. "After all Mister Robbo has done for this institution, you could at least be courteous to him."

Robbo laughed. "That's O.K., Al. Let the kid alone."

Jud glared sullenly at his tormentor. "I didn't wanna join this cockamamie outfit to begin with. I got enough trouble just being an orphan."

"That will be enough, young man!" Dale snapped. "All right, turn in your bow and arrows at once!"

The boy slouched away, ripping off his feathered hat as he went, and muttering to himself, "Wonder what the rap is for moidering an over-age orphan wit' a bow and arrow!"

Chapter Eight

The club was a madhouse of activity. The band and the performers went through their final dress rehearsal while workmen were still setting up the gaming tables and hanging the wall draperies. Robbo was everywhere supervising all the last-minute details. He watched thoughtfully as a crew strung a large banner over the bandstand: OPENING NIGHT—ALL PROCEEDS TO THE ROBIN HOOD FOUNDATION. He jumped as if he had been shot when two movers dropped a crap table with a loud crash.

"Clumsy bastards!" he screamed. "Hey you! Take your dirty mitts off the felt. Use gloves, why dontcha?" He turned to Will. "Did the tailor get here with the costumes yet?"

"No."

"Call him."

As Will went off, Six Second pushed a rolling cart loaded with varicolored chips through the casino. Robbo stopped him. "Ten thousand each

at the craps. Five each at the blackjack . . . Yeah, and the same at the roulette wheels." He looked up at the new chandelier being hung. "Hey Ricks, let that damned thing down about a foot."

Robbo stood with his hands on his hips glowering at John, who had just entered the front door. "Where the hell have you been, pal? There's work to be done!"

"Was working." John staggered over to the bar and collapsed on a stool. "Double scotch," he told the gorilla polishing glasses behind the counter.

Robbo walked over to him. "You look beat."

John nodded wearily. "I was interviewing cocktail waitresses." He lit a cigarette with trembling hands.

Robbo's annoyance left him and he grinned. "Lucky thing we only needed two more. C'mon into the office."

John downed his drink and followed. Inside the office Allen Dale was stacking collection cans on Robbo's desk. "Three dozen, sir. That should do it."

Robbo nodded. "We open in two hours, Al. You better go home and dress—and not in that crazy Robin Hood outfit, either."

Dale flushed. "Oh no, sir. I rented a tuxedo just for the occasion."

Robbo scowled. "Rented? Why didn't you buy one? This is the classiest joint in Chicago."

Six Second entered as Allen left. "Everything is

O.K. on the roof, boss. Got the lookouts posted and everything."

Robbo sat down in the barber's chair and lit a cigarette. "Well, that about ties it up. All we can do now is hope that all the customers will be happy."

John smirked. "I know one guy won't be happy."

"Who's that?"

"Guy Gisborne."

Guy Gisborne had never been more miserable. For two hours he had stationed himself in the vestibule of his new club to greet the customers as they arrived. But not a one had shown up. In disgust he had retreated to the bar where Sheriff Crocker was drinking alone. He bit the end off a cigar and jammed it viciously into his mouth. He spun on the barstool and looked out across the lavish gaming room, empty except for the attendants standing like statues at their tables.

"Glad you're here, Sheriff," he said with sarcasm. "We really need pertection tonight."

Crocker was subdued. "How do you figure it, Guy?"

"You kidding? Everybody's at Robbo's cause he's even more famous than Babe Ruth. Gives a few lousy bucks to the orphans and gets his puss in all the papers . . . while I'm sitting in a three-hundred-thousand-dollar morgue!" He spit at a spittoon and missed.

"It's just a fad, Guy," Crocker said mildly.

"Won't be long before you'll be getting the business again."

Gisborne smiled his unnerving barracuda smile. "I'd better, or someone else will be getting the business!"

Crocker paled and almost upset his drink. "What do you want me to do, Guy?"

Gisborne shoved the cigar about one inch from the tip of the sheriff's nose. "I want you should keep your eyes shut while I round up fifty of my best guns and send them hunting for Robbo."

"No, Guy, you can't!" Crocker was genuinely upset now. "You'd ruin us all if you killed Robbo. He's become too important in this town. He's got influential friends all the way up to the governor. The people love him. There'd be a riot."

"You got a better idea, let's hear it, Sheriff."

"Patience, that's the only way. Wait for a few more days and leave it to me. I'll break Robbo—legally."

Gisborne's eyes narrowed. "So, let's hear it!"

"An official police raid, led by me personally."

Gisborne's voice was warmer. "How many cops?"

"Twenty."

"Thirty."

"All right. We'll move next week."

Gisborne pounded his fist on the bar. "You'll move tonight!"

Crocker shook his head. "Too risky. Every big hot in Chicago is there tonight."

"I don't care if Herbert Hoover is there. We hit Robbo tonight. . . . You might not be around next week, buddy boy."

Crocker shook his head and took out his handkerchief to swab his brow. "Tonight," he said tonelessly.

There were two sentries posted on the roof of the brownstone that housed Robbo's Club. They were each armed with a pair of powerful binoculars through which they scanned the street tirelessly, hour after hour, inspecting every vehicle approaching from both directions. It was a routine task until just after midnight. Suddenly one of the observers tensed and cursed softly. "This looks for real, Red."

The other man moved swiftly to an electrical panel set into the ledge and closed four switches with red rubber handles.

Down below the joint was jumping. Chauffeured limousines blocked traffic in the street. Men and women in evening dress kept arriving until after midnight, only to be turned away by the door guard. The bar was stacked five deep with late-comers who could not get through the throng in the gaming room. Robbo, dressed in a silk tuxedo, his face beaming, circulated as best he could, shaking hands and exchanging banter with the more prominent clients.

State Supreme Court Judge Casper Maloney dropped a hundred-dollar chip onto a number at a roulette table, then dropped another chip into a col-

lection can extended to him by a shapely blonde clad in a skimpy forest-green costume with a small, feathered Robin Hood hat perched on her head.

"Thank you, Judge." She smiled and flounced off with a wiggle of her sculptured behind.

Robbo came up and clapped the judge on the back. "Good to see you, sir."

The judge smiled. "Congratulations, Robbo. It's a wonderful club. Lots of luck."

"How's your luck, Judge?"

The judge grimaced. "Not so good, I'm afraid."

Robbo tapped the houseman on the shoulder. "A thousand on the house to my good friend, Judge Maloney."

The judge was overwhelmed. "Robbo, you don't have to do that."

Robbo winked. "Once in a while I take from the rich and give to the rich. Hope your luck changes, sir."

He walked past the bandstand where a girl vocalist in a short fringed skirt was high-kicking her bare legs to a fast Charleston. At the far end of the room, Little John and Allen Dale were seated at a table tallying up the take from the collection cans as the girls emptied them. When Robbo came up, a buxom wench whose charms were splitting the seams of her Robin Hood costume dumped a stack of hundred-dollar chips in front of John.

John looked surprised. "You back so soon, honey?"

She threw out her chest in pride. "The gentlemen all seem to like my can."

John eyed her admiringly as she wiggled away. "Yeah . . ." He winked at Robbo. "She's got the busiest can in the house."

At that instant a red light on the wall behind him began to flash urgently. Robbo's breath caught in his throat. "The signal, men. Let's move!"

At once Allen Dale began to sweep the chips off the table into a suitcase. John vaulted over the table and followed Robbo across the room to the bandstand.

Backstage there was a hurried briefing, as Will, Six Second, and the other gang members arrived. They had practiced this maneuver, over and over, the way passengers on an ocean liner practice lifeboat drills.

Robbo's voice was tense, but calm. "O.K., we all know what we have to do." There was a chorus of "ayes." Robbo nodded. "All right, men, to your battle stations!"

The hoods scattered, and Robbo went over to a huge switchboard with an intricate layout of circuits, lights, buttons, and handles. The operator, another gang member, was poised for action. "All set, boss?"

Robbo held up his hand and walked to the curtains, peering out across the stage into the gaming room. "Hold it a few more minutes. They're having

a tough time getting the casino cleared. The bar won't take much of an overflow, it's so packed."

A mob of excited patrons were herded backstage. Judge Maloney hailed Robbo. "What the hell is going on around here, Robbo? I was just on a winning streak!"

"It's O.K., Judge. Just a little time out." He laughed. "You don't know it, folks, but you're all going to a revival meeting."

There were gasps of surprise as the Robin Hood girls and the waitresses lined up before a table piled high with Mother Hubbard-type Salvation Army dresses and bonnets. The girls wriggled into the one-piece costumes, then a hood went down the line, zipping them up the back.

Robbo signaled to the judge and opened the curtains. "Be my guest."

The judge peered out into the casino and his eyes bulged. "Good God!"

An unbelievable transformation was taking place in the room. With a loud rumbling of gears and motors, the floor, ceiling, and walls appeared to be coming apart.

Whole sections of the floor were pivoting 180 degrees on steel axles activated by machinery in a secret sub-basement beneath the club. The gaming tables, bolted to the floor, simply disappeared into the cellar; and hard wooden benches, attached to the underside of the flooring, took their place.

Sliding panels drew smoothly over the ornately

decorated walls of the club—cold, bare wooden panels that gave the room the appearance of a barn. The barroom was completely sealed off by a wall of cinder blocks. The bandstand became a speaker's platform with a preacher's lectern adorning it.

The customers had caught the spirit of it now, and they howled with glee as they were ushered to the hard cold benches and handed hymn books. Six Second, dressed in the uniform of a Salvation Army major, passed among them calling out:

"Peace be wid you, brudder. . . . Peace be wid you, sister."

A small melodeon was rolled out onto the platform and the girls—all Salvation Army lasses now—took their places in the aisles with collection cans whose labels had been replaced by Salvation Army stickers.

There was a loud crash at the rear of the hall as the police raiders burst in, led by Sheriff Crocker and Guy Gisborne.

Will, at the lectern, ignored the interruption. "Friends, we are honored tonight by the presence of a righteous man who walks the path of decency and truth. Our guest is the esteemed leader of the First Angelic and Benevolent Congregation of Heavenly Shepherds . . . the Honorable Allen A. Dale."

Crocker and Gisborne, flanked by cops armed with axes and crowbars, were paralyzed with astonishment. Crocker had already gone into his routine

as they bulled their way in: "This club is in violation of Code 378 which prohibits gambling . . ." His voice went downhill slowly and finally died.

"Holy smokes!" said one of the cops, "we got the wrong place!"

Gisborne was stunned. "How could we do that?"

Crocker began to back out of the hall. "Psst, men, back, quick! Let's get out of here."

Gisborne's uncertainty vanished as he surveyed the rows of men and women seated on the wooden benches, all of them dressed in expensive evening clothes. "Hey wait a minute! Do they look like repentant sinners to you, Sheriff?"

His frantic squawking was eclipsed as Will sat down at the organ and Allen Dale led the assembly in a rollicking revivalist hymn.

Gisborne cupped his hands to the sheriff's ears and shouted, "This is a phony! Every crap shooter in town is in this congregation! Pull the place apart, Crocker. I know there's a gambling joint someplace around!"

"Not on your life, Guy!" Crocker stood his ground. "I'm not knocking over any prayer meeting; I'd be run out of town on a rail!"

Like a madman Gisborne staggered around the hall, pounding on the walls, tapping on the floor. Crocker blushed in embarrassment as a smiling Salvation Army lass approached him with a collection tin: "Something for the cause, sir?"

"I-I-I—I'm sorry for this. . . ." he floundered.

Guy and Dale

Then furtively he dropped a nickel into the box. The girls converged on other cops who were grinning sheepishly and trying to hide the axes and crowbars behind their backs. One by one the boys in blue succumbed to the "virtuous" lasses of the Army who were so uncommonly full-bodied beneath the shapeless uniforms and who flashed such wickedly delightful messages from their mascaraed eyes. The coins rattled into the collection boxes.

Gisborne rushed to Crocker. "Tell 'em to stop that! They're feeding Robbo's vultures!"

"We're getting out of here Guy," Crocker said firmly. "You stay if you want. Maybe you could use the religion."

Gisborne sounded as if he were strangling. Some of the cops had joined in the singing, a protest against the evils of booze and bad women.

"Let's go, men," Crocker said, and beat a hasty retreat out the door with the uniformed police trailing after him forlornly.

Six Second bade them farewell at the entrance. "Peace be wid you, brudders."

Gisborne, bringing up the tail end of the procession recoiled when he saw Six. "Crocker!" he rasped. "This mug is one of Robbo's hoods, don't you recognize him?"

"Come on, Guy," the sheriff called wearily as he got into the police car.

Six leered at Gisborne as he left. "You, brudder, can drop dead!" He slammed the door shut.

The singing went on for several minutes more. Backstage, Robbo studied the control panel intently. He relaxed as a green light began to flash. Then he went out onto the platform and smiled at the audience, holding up his hands for silence.

"It's all clear, everybody. I want to thank you for your cooperation. Drinks on the house for the rest of the night. Now, if you'll kindly step out on the sidelines we'll get things back where they belong in a few minutes."

He acknowledged the cheering, the clapping, and the stomping with a modest grin. Allen Dale came over and whispered into his ear.

"Sir, Robin Hood would have been proud of you tonight."

Chapter Nine

A week after Robbo's Club opened, Marian Stevens paid a visit. She was breathtakingly lovely in a low-cut gold mesh evening gown. When she entered the casino every male eye in the room was diverted to her; even the house dealers were unable to concentrate on the table action. Robbo sounded a lot more casual than he felt.

"Slumming tonight, Miss Stevens?"

She smiled sweetly. "I've heard so much about your new place, Robbo, that I had to see it for myself. It's everything they say, only more so."

"Thank you," he said. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"I'd like that."

They sat down at the L of the bar, away from the crowd. She pouted as he lit her cigarette. "I was expecting to hear from you before this, Robbo. . . . But I suppose that now you're a big celebrity you don't have time for old friends."

"You know better than that," he said coolly. "I

didn't think we had anything more to say to each other."

She sighed. "The mountain wouldn't come to Mohammed, so Mohammed went to the mountain."

He blinked at her. "Huh?"

She laid a soft white hand on his sleeve. "Robbo, I came here to tell you I'm sorry about what happened that night at my apartment. I behaved very foolishly." She lowered her eyes demurely. "You were right to put me in my place."

Robbo looked at her with surprise and gratification. This woman bothered him more than he cared to admit, even to himself. No man worthy of his sex could be immune to her allure. He lowered his guard. "Ah, that's O.K., baby. We'll both forget it."

Her voice caressed him. "I want to make it up to you, Robbo."

His heart double-timed. "I told you, forget it."

"Listen, will you come to my place for dinner tomorrow night?"

He didn't have to think about it. "I'd like that fine."

The plot was the same as the last time. A candlelight supper at the long table. Champagne. Crepes suzette. The burly butler hovering over them. And, finally, coffee and brandy in the living room. She curled up on the couch, facing him, after the servants had been dismissed for the night.

"I'm a very proud person, Robbo," she said. "Too proud. It wasn't easy for me to come to you."

He reached over and took her hand. "It wasn't easy for me to stay away, Marian."

For the space of a heartbeat they stared into each other's eyes, then gently Robbo drew her to him and kissed her. It was a long, feverish kiss, and they were both winded when he let her go.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" he whispered.

"Nothing special. Why?"

"We'll get married."

She searched his face without speaking.

Robbo grinned self-consciously. "Well? You waiting for violins or something?"

Her smile was lopsided. "Just being typically female. Honestly, you swept me off my feet, Robbo. You certainly are impulsive."

"No I'm not. It's just that when I make up my mind about something, I get it done fast. I'm not one of those timid guys who have to test-drive a car before they buy it."

"That might be a good idea," she said enticingly. The suggestion came over loud and clear.

Without taking his eyes from her Robbo stood up and walked to the light switch on the wall. He tapped it and the chandelier went out. He headed for the lamp in the bay window.

"Are you sure you want to marry me, Robbo?" she asked. "I'm a pretty expensive commodity—for a small operator, that is."

He switched off the lamp and faced her. There was a hurt, indignant look on his face. "Small

operator! Listen, baby, I'm turning them away every night at the club by the hundreds. Fact is, I'm thinking about opening another club."

"Don't get me wrong, darling," she said soothingly. "You're doing very well. And I know you'll do even better."

"Two clubs, that's all I want." He switched off the pole lamp and walked back to the sofa.

"That will do nicely," she agreed. "If you have other interests on the side."

He put his arms around her, and she pressed against him, her breasts firm and warm against his chest.

"What kind of interests do you mean?" he asked.

"You've got this town by the tail, Robbo." She mussed his hair playfully. "Mister Robin Hood can do no wrong."

He laughed. "They ought to like me. I gave twenty-seven grand to charity last month alone." He reached around her and turned off the lamp on the end table, plunging the room into darkness.

Her mouth was wet against his ear. "You have the respect, the admiration, the confidence of the people, Robbo. It's time to use it." She pushed his hand away from her breast. "Robbo, you aren't listening to me!"

His voice was dreamy. "Sure I am, baby."

She gasped. "Robbo! *Not* until you hear what I have to say to you! There's a banker's national convention in Chicago next week. The city will be

crowded with the richest men in the country. The really big boys. And the biggest of them all will be J. P. Pierpont."

The mood was broken. Robbo switched on the one lamp again and looked at her curiously. "I don't get it."

"Suppose Mister Pierpont were to be met by an escort at Union Station, put into a chauffeured limousine, and whisked away to a comfortable little cabin in the woods. Naturally, he'd be treated royally during his stay."

Robbo's voice was dull. "I hope you don't mean what I think you mean."

"All it would take would be a few phone calls. You could name your own price. One million—maybe even two million. J. P. is probably more important than the President."

"You want we should grab him? Snatch Pierpont?"

Her enthusiasm was overflowing, her eyes shining with a strange light that repelled Robbo. "I'll bet it won't even get to the cops. And if it does, nobody would suspect you. Not Robin Hood."

Robbo's blood pressure was mounting with every word that came out of her pretty mouth. "You're crazy, Marian. J. P. Pierpont is like God. The entire country would be up in arms."

Marian's eyes narrowed in speculation. "Sure it would. We'll ask for three million."

Robbo exploded. "We'll ask for nothing!" He

grabbed her by the arms roughly. "Marian, for God's sake stop acting like a gun moll. Be a woman, Marian!"

She pulled away from him, snarling. "You be a man!"

Robbo gazed upon her with loathing. "And I asked you to be my wife. Christ, I hate to think what kind of kids we'd have!"

The words tumbled out of her in a frenzy. "Robbo, life is grab, grab, grab!"

"All I'm grabbing is my hat, baby." He stood up wearily and started for the door.

Her voice lashed out at his back. "And Big Jim thought you were the man to fill his shoes. What a laugh! You're perfectly satisfied running a lousy speakeasy with a crap game going on the side!"

"It's easier on the pallbearers."

"And those stupid charities! They've given you a certain amount of respectability—and you know what? *You like it!* You're yellow, Robbo! You don't have the stomach for this business at all. Oh God, was Big Jim ever wrong about you! At heart you'd rather be legit, wouldn't you, Robbo?"

Robbo picked up his hat off the commode in the foyer, then hesitated. "Maybe you're right, Marian," he said quietly. "Maybe I don't like this racket at all."

She laughed, an ugly, taunting laugh. "My father should have left you where he found you—in the

gutter. You're a cheap penny-ante hub-cap snatcher!"

Robbo studied her sadly. "Big Jim's little girl. That's funny. . . . What'd you teethe on when you were a baby? A rattle? Sure, with a snake on the business end of it!"

Screeching maniacally, Marian reached for a dish of bonbons on the coffee table. Raging, she hurled it at his head. Robbo ducked quickly into the hall and shut the door behind him. He heard the muffled crash as it struck the panel. Marian's hysterical screams followed him all the way to the elevator.

Not everyone in Chicago considered Robbo to be as small time as did Marian Stevens. The fact was, the unheralded popularity of Robbo and his new club was undermining every other joint in the city. Ever since the opening, the South Side clubs had been operating in the red, with Guy Gisborne's white elephant at the top of the list. In desperation he called a board meeting of the syndicate's top hoods. They sat around a poker table in the empty casino of his café chewing gloomily on their expensive cigars and listening to Gisborne's tirade.

"This is the most people what's been in this dump since it opened. Our backs is to the wall, make no mistake about it. It's got to be him or us—there ain't no other way."

Noodnik Pulaski interceded mildly. "I wished there was some other way, Guy. You know, Robbo's

doin' some darn nice things for this town. In a way he's giving our business a pretty good name."

"He's giving Robbo a good name!" Gisborne shouted ferociously. "You and me is still big bums. I'm telling you, if Robbo isn't taken care of we're all gonna end up bumming handouts at one of them Robin Hood soup kitchens!"

Noodnik smiled pleasantly. "Yeah, my old man eats all his meals there."

"Listen, *you!*" Gisborne thrust his cigar threateningly into Noodnik's face. "Maybe you'd like to join up with his band of merry men and walk around with a red feather sticking outta your hat!"

Noodnik cringed down in his chair. "Sorry, Guy."

"I t'ink he's a threat to the younger generation," Blue Jaw said self-righteously. "Last night I caught a kid stealing a tire off my car and he pulled a bow and arrow on me!"

Gisborne cast his eyes imploringly heavenward. "What are we gonna do?"

"It won't be easy to get rid of Robbo," Sheriff Crocker said. "He's well protected."

Blue Jaw scoffed. "Ahh, them triggermen of his don't bodder me any. We got 'em outnumbered."

"I wasn't referring to his hoods, gentlemen," Crocker explained. "Robbo's bodyguards—the ones that worry me—are the people of this city. They'll tear your organization apart if anything happens to Robbo."

Gisborne pounded his fists on the table. "He's

still gotta go. We can't wait any longer. He's gotta be hit!"

"If you're thinking about ambushing his car, count me out," Tomatoes said. "He's got an elephant gun hidden in his exhaust pipe." He shuddered in recollection. "Them poor guys. Wasn't even enough left of 'em to bury."

"No violence," Crocker said emphatically. "You do, and all deals are off as far as the sheriff's office is concerned."

Gisborne glowered at the sheriff in apoplectic silence, striving to control an urge to do murder on the spot.

"My friend is working on anudder cornerstone," Twitch offered helpfully. "'Course it's for a synagogue."

"Definitely out!" Sheriff Crocker said.

Liver Jackson giggled. "Even if we got Robbo to convert?"

Gisborne eyed Crocker sullenly. "You heard the sheriff. If Robbo disappeared it would be the same as if he got hit. People would squawk too loud."

Vermin Witkotski went into a coughing fit. "I gotta idea," he choked.

"Yeah, we know," Gisborne scowled. "Somebody open a window."

Vermin shook his head vigorously, and finally caught his breath. "No, an idea on how to get ridda Robbo. You see, before we tucked in Sheriff Glick in 'at cornerstone, I snagged a couple of little sou-

venirs for my kids . . . like his badge and his gun and his wallet." Vermin broke off awkwardly as the other men at the table riveted all their attention on him. "Did I say something wrong?"

Gisborne looked positively benign. "Vermin old buddy, your woids are music to my ears. Play us some more, Vermin."

"Well . . . I was thinking. . . . Suppose we take all them things and plant 'em on Robbo?"

Crocker and Gisborne exchanged a look of wondering joy, like two men who have stumbled upon the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

"Keep playing, Vermin," Gisborne sang, the barracuda smile full upon his face.

The next morning Robbo arrived at the club uncommonly late again. John winked knowingly. "That Stevens dame again, eh boss?"

Robbo's face was straight as he took off his coat and hung it on the clothes tree in the corner of the room. "I don't know any dame by that name, John. You got me mixed up with somebody else."

John and Will and Six exchanged knowledgeable looks. "So that's the way it is," John said solemnly.

"That's the way it is." Robbo opened his collar and threw himself into the barber's chair. "Six, give me a shave and a trim."

"Right, boss." With a professional air he fastened a barber's cape snugly around Robbo's neck. There was a knock at the door, and Allen Dale came in followed by Ricks the contractor.

"Excuse me, sir," Dale said. "Mister Ricks wants to know if we are prepared to settle our obligation with his firm."

Robbo grinned. "You mean he wants to get paid off, is that right, Ricks?"

Ricks nodded stiffly. "If everything is satisfactory, of course."

"Everything is perfect. You're A-Number One in my book, Ricks."

"Thank you."

Robbo looked at John. "So, pay the man, Little John." While John counted out the thousand-dollar notes, he went on talking to the builder. "Ricks, I'm negotiating for the building at 2401 Piedmont. If I swing it, you're gonna build me Club Number Two."

"I'll stand by," Ricks said.

"Twice as big," Robbo said. "The same gimmick as here."

John laughed. "The way we're turning the people away here, it ought to be ten times as big."

Ricks was full of admiration. "Whether you like it or not, Robbo, you're destined to be bossman of Chicago."

Robbo was glum. "I'm not so sure I do like it."

Six was honing his straight razor when the door burst open. Will and John went for their guns instinctively. Then they spotted the blue uniforms in the background and froze.

"Hold it!" a hawk-nosed man said sharply. He flashed a badge. "Homicide squad," he identified

himself. He and another plainclothesman stalked over to the barber's chair and confronted Robbo.

"You Robbo?" he growled.

"Sure," Robbo admitted. "What's up, Captain? No homicides around here."

"We ain't so sure. Robbo, we got a warrant for your arrest."

Robbo tore off the barber's cape and sat up indignantly. "Arrest! What the hell for?"

"Suspicion of murder."

"Whose murder?"

"Sheriff Morton Glick."

Robbo was dumfounded. He looked from John to Will to Six Second and back to the detective. "That's crazy, Captain," he said.

"We never was near the bum," John put in.

"What makes you think I hit the sheriff?" Robbo demanded.

"Got a phone tip to strip your car," the officer told him. "Found Glick's badge, gun, and wallet in the trunk."

Robbo laughed hoarsely. "And you think I'd be stupid enough to leave that stuff around if I had anything to do with it?"

The detective shrugged. "Look, my orders are to pick you up. Let's go, Robbo."

Will was outraged. "It stinks! It's a plant and you guys know it!"

The other detective put a hand on Robbo's arm. "Let's go!"

Robbo shook off the hand and stepped out of the chair. He nodded to John and Will. "You guys watch the store."

"What about the charities, sir?" Dale inquired timidly.

"Keep on just like you been doing. Nothing changes, O.K.?" He put on his hat and coat and walked out between the two burly detectives.

The hoods sat around stunned and speechless for a few minutes. At last John sighed. "This business is going to the dogs. Can you beat that Gisborne being so sneaky?"

"Yeah," Six said sadly. "He didn't even have the decency to bury the sheriff with his badge and gun."

Chapter Ten

The year 1929 brought two great crises to the nation. One was the Wall Street crash. The other was the murder trial of Robin Hood—as the newspapers insisted on calling the defendant throughout the affair. The scene outside the courthouse during those tense days was reminiscent of the rioting in Moscow's Red Square during the Russian Revolution. Militant demonstrators, held at bay by a cordon of police armed with tear-gas guns, marched around the building bearing signs and banners with bold captions:

ROBIN HOOD IS GOOD, GOOD, GOOD!

ROBBO FOR SHERIFF!

CHICAGO'S BEST FRIEND—ROBIN HOOD!

ROBBO WAS FRAMED!

Inside the courtroom things were equally as hectic. Aside from the newsmen, the gallery was made up predominantly of the beneficiaries of Robbo's

charity: slum mothers with two or three squalling brats on their laps; skid row bums who had been rehabilitated by the soup kitchens and the missions set up by Ye Olde Robin Hood Foundation. The orphans were there, too, in their Robin Hood outfits. The spectators were openly hostile to the judge, the prosecutor, and the prosecution witnesses. Guy Gisborne was almost mobbed when he testified. His testimony was very damaging to the defense.

Beaming his barracuda smile at the four ladies and eight gentlemen of the jury, Gisborne proceeded to hammer nails in Robbo's coffin, cued by the prosecutor, a weasel-faced man with a high celluloid collar and a diamond stickpin the size of a walnut—a gift from Gisborne.

"A bunch of the boys and me was having our weekly mah-jongg session in the Nottingham Hotel this afternoon, when Robbo and his hoods blew in. Lessee, it was shortly after Big Jim's untimely dameese . . ."

"Demise," said the prosecutor.

"Yeah, dat's what I said. Anyway, Robbo says that now Big Jim's flat, he's taking over things in Chi. Tells us we gotta cut him in fifty per cent of our profits for pertection."

"And what was your reaction, sir?"

Gisborne drew himself up very straight in the witness chair. "I tol' him that no racketeer is gonna run this fine city while we gotta a strong, honest, dedicated man like Sheriff Glick in office."

"What did he say to that?"

"He said not to worry about the sheriff, 'cause he's gonna fix his wagon. Next thing the sheriff disappears."

Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom. A shower of rotten tomatoes and eggs descended on the witness. The crowd was on its feet, hissing and booing. The judge, blue with rage, pounded for order with his gavel. Robbo's chief counsel shouted his objections to the witness's testimony:

"I object, Your Honor, on the grounds that this man is a convicted murderer and racketeer. He has been indicted six times in the past for perjury, and he's doing it again now."

"Overruled!" said the judge, who had been a heavy loser in Gisborne's club. Just before the trial, Guy had torn up his IOUs. His Honor then declared a recess after a ripe kumquat struck him in the mouth.

Sheriff Crocker took the stand when the court reconvened.

"Sheriff Crocker," the prosecutor began, "do you know of any meetings between the defendant and Sheriff Glick prior to or after the murder of Big Jim Boloni?"

"I know of one," Crocker lied. "Robbo told the sheriff that a fatal accident was due to befall Big Jim and he wanted to know if the sheriff would be interested in negotiating a business arrangement."

"A business arrangement?"

"Yes, he wanted to buy protection from the sheriff's office. Of course, Sheriff Glick threw him out forcibly."

"Did Robbo ever try further persuasion on the sheriff?"

"He did. He phoned Sheriff Glick and threatened his life if the sheriff did not agree to his nefarious proposition."

The prosecutor hooked his thumbs under his galluses, the way he had read Clarence Darrow always did it. "In other words, the sheriff was a man who could not be bribed. He was a man of unquestionable honesty, an upstanding public official and a solid citizen?"

Crocker cast a sly glance at Guy Gisborne sitting with the prosecution witnesses. "A very *solid* citizen," he replied.

Once again violence erupted among the spectators, and the witness was pelted with decayed vegetables. The judge took refuge underneath the bench and rapped for order on the floor.

A surprise witness for the prosecution was Marian Stevens. For the first time in the course of the trial, Robbo, who had been bored and resigned with the proceedings, showed some emotion.

"I don't get it," he whispered to his lawyers. "She was supposed to be our witness."

The chief counsel was grim. "Sorry, Robbo. She told us she had nothing to say *to* you or *for* you."

Marian, at her sexiest, was sworn in and sat down

in the witness chair, crossing her knees for the benefit of the male jurors. The court had a fine view of her pink angora peekaboo garters.

"Miss Stevens, I know how difficult it must be for you to appear here today," the prosecutor said dolorously.

Marian wiped at her eyes with a hanky. "It brings back sad memories, but nothing matters but truth and justice."

"A noble attitude, ma'am." He cleared his throat. "It is common knowledge that up until your father's death, he and the defendant were very close friends and business associates."

"That's true. Daddy thought of Robbo as a son."

"And was his affection for this—this Robbo reciprocated?"

"Daddy always believed that Robbo would have cut off his right arm if he had asked him to." She paused. "That is, he believed it until just before his death."

"You mean he no longer trusted Robbo?"

"No, he didn't. The night before he was—" She broke off and blew her nose daintily. "I can't stand to think about it, I'm sorry."

"There, there." The prosecutor handed her the handkerchief from his breast pocket.

She regained her composure presently and went on. "The night before Daddy was murdered, he told me that he had been wrong about Robbo all these years. He said Robbo had given him an ultimatum."

"What kind of an ultimatum?"

"Robbo told him that if he didn't retire and turn over the management of his various business enterprises to him that he would retire Daddy permanently."

"Objection!" bawled the defense.

"Overruled," said the judge.

Robbo shook his head in disbelief. "I'm glad Big Jim ain't around to hear this. It would kill him."

On the way out of the courtroom, Marian was attacked by irate Robin Hood fans and the clothes were practically all torn off her back. The show was so good that the cops didn't come to her rescue until she was down to panties and bra. Then they hustled her into a taxi with a trench coat wrapped around her.

It was an unsettling experience even for a hard-nosed wench like Marian, but a hot bath and a double martini helped her to unwind. And by the time Little John arrived to keep their supper date she was in top form once more.

"Why did you ask me here tonight, baby?" John asked bluntly as he sat down opposite her at the long table with the candles and floral arrangement.

"You didn't want to come?"

"A Supreme Court injunction couldn't have kept me away—but I'm curious just the same."

She took a cigarette out of her gold case, and Dawson the butler leaped to light it for her. "I never see you at the trial, John."

"I'm busy minding the store like the boss told me." His eyes narrowed. "You go there every day?"

She laughed. "It's the best show in town."

Uneasily, John gulped his drink.

Marian was a skillful interrogator, and by the time the meal was over, she knew everything about John from his birth to the present.

"What was the real reason you left Indiana?" she asked him as they drank champagne with strawberries.

"The big boss, Grubby Matson, had a girl friend. A stripper named Honey Bee. Then Grubby got the word that I was sampling his private stock. Guess he didn't cotton to the idea of paying for the hive and having somebody else getting any of the honey. So . . . I decided to buzz off."

Marian smiled. "It's obvious that your two great loves are women and pool. Which one comes first, John?"

John folded his napkin and settled back in his chair. "I tell you, baby, the day I find a dame who can handle a cue, that will be paradise." He hurried around the table and held her chair as she arose. He had a teasing glimpse down her deep-plunging neckline that made his head spin. On rocky legs he followed her into the living room. The sequined skirt was molded to her rolling buttocks.

"Father taught me the game when I was twelve," she said across her shoulder.

John's eyes rolled with every movement of her hindquarters. "What's your particular game?"

"Rotation."

He sighed. "With your chassis, it figures."

She smiled coyly and led him to the couch like a lamb going to slaughter. "So where do you go from here, John?"

He frowned. "Hard to say until the trial is over. Depends on what happens to the boss."

She curled up beside him on the couch. "Let's face facts. Robbo is finished. If he doesn't get the chair, he'll be on ice for at least twenty years . . . That's a long time to mind the store."

John watched the butler serve the coffee and brandy. "At two grand a week, I'll eat, at least."

Marian dismissed the servants and stood up to stretch. "John, you're a big boy now. It's time you had a store of your own. When you see something that's up for grabs, you should grab it."

His gaze was riveted on her hard-nippled breasts. "I was just getting the range," he said.

She looked vaguely annoyed. "I think we are on two different tracks."

John smiled contentedly. "Sooner or later we'll come to a junction." He leaned forward and reached for her, but she stepped nimbly away.

"Your throttle is wide open," she said. "Go slow."

"Uh-uh, this is a fast express, baby." He got up slowly and stalked her. This time she did not get

away. He embraced her with the tenacity of an octopus and kissed her long and passionately. She responded fiercely with her body, but her mind was on more practical matters.

"Wait—John, I've got a proposition for you."

He laughed softly. "Hey, that's supposed to be my line."

He tried to pull her down on the couch. "Wait," she protested, "the lights." He let her go. She talked earnestly and convincingly as she went through the familiar ritual: the chandelier out, the lamp in the bay window out, the pole lamp out—then back to the couch.

By the time she returned to him, John had lost some of his ardor. "I don't like it," he said morosely. "Robbo is my pal."

"But it's not as if you were forcing Robbo out, taking over from him like Gisborne wants to do," she reasoned. "But with Robbo in jail somebody has to take control. I can tell you have imagination, John. I wouldn't be surprised if you could make something really big out of Robbo's operation."

"Yeah . . . I got a few ideas," he admitted with pride.

"Like what?"

"Like dumping them stupid charities, for a beginning."

Marian looked disappointed. "You're wrong, Johnny. That's the best horse in the race. Look

what the charities have done for Robbo. Only he doesn't get the mileage out of them that he could."

"Best horse in the race," John repeated tonelessly. He studied her curiously. "You talk like you want to be a jockey."

She laughed. "Guess it's post time." Slowly she reached across him and switched out the remaining light.

Chapter Eleven

Robbo's trial ended without a single witness testifying for the defense. Robbo took the stand briefly to deny the charges and made an impromptu speech to the jury:

"There's probably a hundred and one reasons why I should be on trial here," he said with sincerity, and gazed accusingly around the room at Gisborne, at Crocker, at other racketeers and crooked officials. "The same reason why a lot of other people sitting here ought to be on trial. But murder is not one of those reasons. . . . Big Jim was the best friend I ever had in this town, in this world. I would never have done anything to hurt that man. He was tops in my book. . . . As for Sheriff Glick, well, he was a prize bum, and I admit I didn't shed any tears when he checked out. But I didn't have nothing to do with it, and that's the truth, so help me God. This city is infested with louses like Glick, and you get rid of one and an-

other one, maybe worse, takes its place." He stared at Crocker. "Anyway, murder just ain't part of my operation. That's all I got to say."

The spectators cheered him as he got up and went back to his seat at the defense table. The judge was so mad that he cleared the court before he addressed his final remarks to the jury. It was a discourse of unprecedented vituperation directed against the defendant, topped by much fist-shaking and shouted threats at the jurymen and jurywomen:

". . . And if you don't bring in a verdict of 'Guilty' against this murderous, thieving scoundrel," the judge charged them, "you all ought to be tarred and feathered and run out of town!"

The jury was out only about ten minutes. As it filed back into the courtroom, Robbo and his lawyers watched them glumly.

"I don't know why they bothered leaving the room," the chief counsel said. "The judge called the shots. The verdict is just a rubberstamp."

"You figure it's going to be real bad?" Robbo asked.

The attorney shrugged. "If you're real lucky, you may get off with twenty years."

Robbo smiled wanly. "That's an awful lot of license plates."

After much violent banging of his gavel, the judge managed to achieve a semblance of quiet in the

courtroom. He cleared his throat and looked at the jury. "Have you reached a verdict?"

The jury foreman stood up. "Yes, sir, we have."

"The defendant will rise and face the jury."

Robbo and his chief counsel stood up as directed.

"You may read the verdict," said the judge.

The foreman took a deep breath. "I know this is irregular, but we would like to preface the verdict with a statement. For four weeks this jury has been listening attentively to a parade of prosecution witnesses. Now, to hear them tell it, the defendant not only killed Sheriff Glick, but he sank the 'Lusitania,' started the Chicago fire, is responsible for the Wall Street crash—not to mention that he killed Cock Robin."

There was a rumble of excitement among the spectators. Robbo leaned forward in an agony of suspense.

The jury foreman continued. "I've been a house detective for thirty-four years, Your Honor, and I've seen some pretty good ringers in my time, listened to some expert liars. But I think the prosecution has assembled under this roof the most fantastic collection of shifty-eyed, double-crossing, bald-faced liars in captivity.

"Now, the defendant could have put his own ringers on the stand. I expect his hoods would have backed up everything he said. But what would it have proved? As the defense counsel said early in the trial, what good is the word of a witness who is

a known criminal, who makes his livelihood out of being dishonest and breaking the law? I think Robbo knew that, so he didn't bother. All he could do was to stand up and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I may not be lily white, but I am not a murderer.' "

"We the jury believe him. Our verdict is 'Not Guilty.' "

There was one moment of electric silence, then the gallery erupted in a wild banshee wail of triumph that almost blew the windows out of the old courthouse. The guards made a feeble effort to restore order, then abandoned the room to Robin Hood and his Merry Men—and Merry Women and Merry Children. A score of hands reached out to touch their champion. Laughing and protesting, Robbo was hoisted onto the shoulders of a dozen brawny admirers and carried out of the building and down the sweeping courthouse steps. There he was greeted by the thunderous cheers of the picketers in the street. The word of his acquittal had spread rapidly, and by the time he appeared freshly painted signs were being held aloft proclaiming:

CHICAGO LOVES ROBIN!

ROBBO FOR SHERIFF!

CONGRATULATIONS ROBBO!

THE BEST MAN WON!

TOMORROW THE WHITE HOUSE!

The crowd began to chant: "*We want Robbo! We want Robbo!*" With Will, Six Second, and Allen Dale running interference for him, Robbo finally made the big limousine parked at the curb—in defiance of a fire hydrant as well as a NO PARKING—PRIVATE sign. A hundred policemen stood by woodenly and not one made a move to take out his ticket book; it would have been suicidal, the way sentiment was running. As the car pulled away the people were singing, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

"Aren't they something?" Robbo commented, waving to his public on both sides of the street. "This is one day I will never forget if I live to be a hundred." He felt light, gay, omnipotent, like one of the Greek gods he had read about who hung out on Mount Olympus.

Wound up with elation, he talked compulsively and excitedly. They were halfway to the club before he realized that his three friends were strangely silent and somber.

"Hey, you guys!" he laughed. "Why the long faces? You act like you was going to a funeral instead of a homecoming."

Allen Dale coughed, and Will said to no one in particular, "It's still early."

Robbo frowned. "Very funny, very funny. What's that supposed to mean?"

But the three hoods were evasive and uncooperative until they reached the club. The place was

empty, except for the cleaning women who were clearing away the aftermath of what had apparently been a busy and hectic night.

Robbo rubbed his hands together in satisfaction. "Looks like the joint was really jumping last night. Well, wait till tonight. This is going to be a party to top all parties. I want it bigger than New Year's Eve. Will . . . Al . . . I'll leave it up to you. Noise-makers, balloons, confetti, the works, O.K.?" He took out his key ring and went in back of the bar to the cash register. "You'll need a lot of cash. Here. I'll give it to you now." He slipped the small, familiar key into the lock on the front of the register and tried to turn it. It jammed.

"What the hell!" He struggled with the lock a few more seconds then turned back to the other three men. They were a frightened trio.

"O.K., let's have it!" he snapped.

Will's Adam's apple jumped. "The lock's been changed."

"I can see that! Why?"

Will looked fearfully to Dale who said in a low voice, "John changed it, sir."

The sinews in Robbo's thin face were beginning to work ominously. "What did he do that for?"

Will blurted it out. "He thought you was riveted for at least twenty years, Robbo."

"I see," Robbo said in an even voice. "Which brings up another point. How come I never saw John even once at the trial?"

Dale exhaled loudly. "Well . . . sir . . . he was working very hard. You did put him in charge, you know?"

"And John took charge, is that it?" Robbo asked.

"Yes, sir." He hesitated. "There have been a few changes around here, sir."

Robbo took out a cigarette and jammed it into his mouth. "Well, suppose you start telling me about them."

Dale took out a handkerchief and mopped his perspiring forehead. "There's the soup kitchens for one thing. . . ."

"The soup kitchens!" Robbo was mystified. "Maybe we better take a little tour, boys. C'mon." He headed for the door.

"Do you think Robbo will do anything rash? I hope not," Dale whispered to Will.

"Just hope he gets the same jury," Will said.

They trooped out after Robbo and climbed into the car.

At the first soup kitchen, they pushed through the mob of derelicts blocking the doorway and went inside. Robbo stood with his hands on his hips and surveyed the stream of bums holding out their bowls for the generous dipper of steaming soup dispensed by the fat chef in the Robin Hood cap.

"So, everything looks about the same to me," he said.

Allen Dale nodded toward the rear of the establishment. "Back in the office, sir."

Robbo stalked back and pounded on the office door. A peephole opened in its panel, exposing one startled eye.

"Robbo!" a voice exclaimed.

"Open up, buster!" Robbo said.

The door swung open, and they marched inside. "What's all this jazz with the door locked and the pigeonhole?" Robbo demanded. "You'd think this was the vault of the First National Bank—" He stopped short with his mouth wide open as the interior of the room began to register on his senses. In one corner of the room was a printing press. Beside that, an engraver's table with two men huddled over sets of plates. In the opposite corner of the room an unfamiliar hood was methodically cutting up sheets of brand new twenty-dollar bills. Another hood was crinkling the fresh bills in his hands, then smearing banana pulp into them to simulate aging. Another team was stacking the bills in five-gallon soup tins labeled: MINESTRONE—YE OLDE ROBIN HOOD FOUNDATION SOUP KITCHENS.

The foreman, a stocky, bald-headed man, came over to Robbo with his hand outstretched, a black-toothed grin on his face. "Hi, Robbo! When'd you get out?"

Robbo was nearly speechless with anger. He managed to growl, "Jake, where's John?"

Jake shrugged and turned to his crew. "Anybody know where the boss is?"

"The boss!" Robbo strangled.

The man at the engraving table looked up. "I guess he's where he always is—with Her Royal Majesty."

Robbo whirled on Will and Allen Dale. "Marian Stevens? So, she's the one behind all this?"

Will and Dale stood there with their heads bowed, unable to reply.

"Let's go!" Robbo said. He started for the door, then turned back to the foreman. "You get all this crap out of here before tomorrow morning. Dump the presses in the lake. Burn the money."

"Robbo," Jake started to protest, but they were gone. Jake looked after them, shaking his head. "Poor bastard, he's dead but he won't lie down."

The car glided to a stop in front of the swanky apartment house on Lake Michigan. A liveried door-man opened the door, and Robbo leaped out.

"You guys wait here," he ordered Will and Dale. "I can handle this job all by myself."

The elevator bumped to a gentle stop, the doors parting silently. Robbo stepped out into the thickly carpeted corridor and found Marian's door. He tried the knob cautiously; it was locked. He examined the assortment of keys on his key ring and chose one that looked as if it would do the job. He fitted it into the lock and turned it quietly. The door swung in without a sound. On cat's feet he stepped into the foyer and walked to the archway overlooking the sunken living room. He stood there with a cold smile playing across his bloodless lips.

Little John was sprawled out on the sofa in a brocade dressing gown and slippers, reading the racing form. Marian sat in an easy chair facing the couch, speaking earnestly into the telephone. She wore a diaphanous lace negligee which did little to conceal her lush, naked body beneath it. As she talked she consulted an open folder in her lap.

"... The reports from Atlanta are just fabulous, Gus. They passed that last fifty grand in less than forty-eight hours. . . . What I can't understand is why you haven't made any progress in New England. . . . Gus, it's wide open. Now get busy on a kitchen in Boston. . . . What? . . . You say the Irish won't eat minestrone! Hell, Gus! Toss in a couple of clams and call it chowder . . . Fine . . . O.K., be sure and keep in touch. . . . 'Bye, Gus." She hung up the phone and stood up.

"Little John!" she said in mild exasperation.

John did not look up from the form. "Umm," he mumbled.

Deliberately she let the negligee fall open in front. As if by some inexplicable magnetism, John's eyes were drawn up and away from the page. He emitted a long, shuddering sigh.

"John," she complained, "don't you think you should get off your fanny once in a while and go down to the club? Check on the other operations?"

John put down the paper and put his arms around her thighs, drawing her close to him. "I got my work cut out for me here, baby," he murmured. "Besides,

you got everything under control." He wrestled her down on the couch.

"Not quite everything!" Robbo's voice broke in sharply from the foyer. He came slowly down the steps and walked slowly toward the couch.

John shoved Marian away from him as if she were stolen goods and Robbo was the law. His face was ashen. "Robbo," he gulped.

Unhurriedly, Marian stood up and wrapped the negligee snugly around her. There was a smirk on her face. "Well, well. Jail's out early today."

Robbo acted as if she were not in the room. "John," he said, "I'm disappointed in you."

John sat there like a small sullen boy, with his hands folded in his lap. "What the hell, Robbo! You put me in charge, didn't you?"

Robbo laughed dryly. "If you had tried to take over on your own, I could have respected you, at least."

"We're not taking over, Robbo," John said hastily. "We just goosed up the action a little."

"Like using the soup kitchens as a front for counterfeiting?"

"Show him last week's reports, Marian," John said defensively. "If things keep going the way they have been going, we'll triple our take this year."

Marian offered the folder to Robbo. He took it and glanced at it briefly.

"See, it's still the Robin Hood Foundation," John said eagerly.

"Thanks!" Robbo fixed him with a withering look and proceeded to tear up the reports into little pieces. He dropped the pieces at Marian's feet. Her eyes glittered with hate.

Robbo addressed himself to John. "Old buddy, have a nice trip back to Indiana. Don't bother to thank me, it's for old times' sake." He looked at Marian. "We don't have any girls' rules in this racket, Marian. You make a mistake, you pay like everyone else. . . . Don't make any more mistakes."

She spat at him like a wildcat. "Thanks for nothing, punk! Big Jim's daughter doesn't need any special reprieve from the likes of you! You know something Robbo? You're very funny! Hilarious is the word." She snatched a cigarette from the box on the coffee table and shoved it in her mouth.

Little John, reflexively, made a move to reach for a lighter, then tensed as he caught Robbo's disapproving gaze. Trembling with rage, Marian lit her own cigarette and blew a rolling cloud of smoke into Robbo's unblinking eyes.

Her voice quivered. "Listen, Robbo, you're a has-been. You're out! I'm in! You take your orders from me from now on. The Robin Hood Foundation stays as it is. You are an employee. You will go to the office every day like any other working man. You will have a pen and a checkbook and a small bank account for your charities. You are going to play the Robin Hood role to the hilt. There'll be

only one difference. You're working for Big Jim's daughter!"

Robbo's voice was toneless. "John, you ever go into the reptile house over at the zoo? Every cage you look into you see Marian."

A low moan of fury grew in her throat. She stepped forward and drew back one hand to strike him. But with lightning swiftness Robbo's right hand flashed across her face, backhanded so that she felt the force of his knuckles. With a yelp of pain she fell backward onto the carpet, the robe billowing around her naked hips, her legs askew. She lay there stunned in a posture that most men would have found extremely provocative. Robbo glared at her coldly, with revulsion. Then he turned to John.

"Be my guest," he said acidly. Whirling around he walked out of the room and the apartment.

Marian sat up, repairing her negligee and her modesty. But her dignity was shattered. John shook his head like a man coming out of a trance. Now she was nothing more than another woman, crouching on the floor, holding her red, puffed cheek and crying in frustration, pain, and rage. A dangerous hellcat, but only another woman. He stood up and when he spoke his voice was somehow different, firmer, more authoritative.

"Baby," he said, "you didn't handle that right at all. Not at all. You don't make a stooge out of a guy like Robbo. Look what happened to Osborne."

She scrambled to her feet, still sniveling. "He's nothing now. Just a name on a headstone!"

John's eyes widened. "Say, listen, kiddo . . ."

"He's just signed his own death certificate!" she ranted. "We don't need him any more. We've got his name, we've got his reputation. Tonight *you* will get rid of the rest!"

John's expression was cold. His voice was even colder. "Not this hood. I may not like everything Robbo does. But I like Robbo."

"You're scared of him!" she accused.

"Scared?" A funny little smile played over John's mouth. "I'm scared all right. But not of Robbo. I'm scared of you. You move too fast for a simple country boy like me." He turned away and walked slowly toward the bedroom. "I think it's time I started packing."

She followed him into the bedroom, keeping up an incessant harangue. "You're yellow! Even yellower than Robbo! A two-bit candy-store Romeo with Indiana mud in your ears. I give you half of Chicago and this is how you pay me off." She clenched her fingers in her wild hair and wailed like a Harpy. "Go on! Go back to your precious Robin Hood. You two belong together. Next thing you know the two of you will be teaching Sunday school!"

John seated himself on the bed and put on his socks. Marian's robe had come undone again, and for one brief moment his eyes lingered on the bare

sleek columns of her perfect legs. Then he looked down and sighed.

"One thing a guy has gotta learn in the business world. Never work for a boss with pretty legs. Can't keep your mind on business. . . . Now you take Robbo . . . when he crosses his legs—nothing!"

His laughter followed Marian as she stormed out of the room.

Ten minutes later he was gone, and Marian picked up the phone. She gave the operator a number and tapped her fingers nervously on the arm of the chair until the voice answered at the other end.

"Hello, is this Mister Guy Gisborne?"

"Yeah," came the suspicious answer.

"Well, this is Big Jim's daughter . . . Marian Stevens."

The suspicion mounted. "*Robbo's goil?*"

Marian's bitterness was genuine. "Past tense, Mister Gisborne. *Was* Robbo's girl. Right now I wish he was dead."

Gisborne's interest revived. "*Well, well. We got something in common, Miss Stevens.*"

"That's what I thought. How would you like to come to my place for dinner tonight?"

Chapter Twelve

The design of Marian's intimate dinner parties was as invariable as the design of the web a spider spins to trap flies. Guy Gisborne, awed by the lavish apartment, by the butler and houseboy, by the candlelight supper, and mostly by Marian herself, was not his loquacious self during the meal. He was one male guest at least who was not annoyed by the length of table and floral arrangements which separated him from his hostess. He was grateful, actually, because she could not observe his confusion with the vast array of silverware that adorned his place. The broiled squab was just too much for him, so he picked it up and chewed the tender meat off the frame.

"So you're Big Jim's little goil," he said between mouthfuls. "You sure di'n't inherit his built!"

Marian smiled. "How sweet of you Mister Gisborne."

"Now di'n't I tell you to call me Guy? Guy, baby—I mean Miss Stevens."

Marian's voice was sultry. "And you must call me Marian . . . Guy."

"Dat's a deal, ba—Marian." Gisborne put down the mutilated squab and wiped his greasy fingers on his napkin. "You got real class, Marian. I go for that." He laughed self-consciously. "I know I ain't got the best manners. Maybe if we get to be friends you could learn me etti—etter—etet—"

"Etiquette," Marian finished for him. "Dat's a deal, Guy. . . . For starters, how about you coming around here and holding my chair for me so I can get up."

Gisborne sprang up so fast he almost upset his own chair. "My pleasure, *mademooselle!*" He skipped around the table. "Bet you di'n't know I could speak French?"

She smiled up at him as he leaned over the back of her chair. "I don't think there is any limit to your talent, Guy. As a matter of fact, that's why I asked you here tonight. I want to make use of your vast talent."

The barracuda smile had a particularly hungry look to it as Gisborne peered into the loose bodice of Marian's gown. "Let's talk business some udder time. Tonight let's get to know each udder, sweetie."

She took his arm and led him into the parlor. "I'm afraid time is of the essence, Guy. You know what they say, business before pleasure."

Gisborne feasted his eyes on the hard-nippled thrust of her breasts and licked his lips. "Yeah, but let's not forget about the pleasure, heh-heh-heh."

When coffee and brandy had been served and the servants had been dismissed, Marian curled up like a pussycat beside Gisborne on the couch. Gingerly she removed the big black cigar from his mouth and deposited it in an ashtray.

"You don't mind, do you, Guysie?" She wrinkled up her nose. "How can you smoke those horrible things?"

Gisborne could not have been more offended if she had insulted his mother. "Dat's a buck cigar, lady."

She patted his pouting cheeks. "But there's a time and a place for everything, Guysie," she said sweetly. She lowered her eyelids. "Doesn't it get in the way when you kiss your girl?"

Gisborne's enthusiasm was restored. "I ain't got no goil—yet. But I sure am available."

Marian sighed. "A big handsome goose like you unattached. I just don't believe it."

Gisborne tittered like a schoolgirl and blushed furiously. "Well, it's the gospel trut'. I'm looking for the old-fashioned type of goil, and they don't hardly make them any more. Leastways in Chicago they don't."

"I'm an old-fashioned type *goil*, Guysie," she said demurely.

Gisborne read the invitation in her eyes and he

squirmed impatiently. "Let's get this business over wit' quick and get on to more interesting stuff."

Marian related the details of her unsuccessful efforts to convert Robbo to the big time. ". . . So, when Robbo went to jail, I moved in on the charities. The pool hustler was fronting for me."

"So you was the brain!" Gisborne said with admiration. "I figured it couldn't be Indiana John. He's a cantaloupe."

"I built that operation," she said determinedly, "and I don't intend to give it up. But I can't fight Robbo alone. If you take care of him, Guy, you and I have a partnership."

Gisborne's enthusiasm took a nose dive. "Dat's easier said than done, Marian. Foist of all, Robbo don't hit so easy. He can plug you wit' both hands in his pockets. He shoots wit' his navel."

"Your gang is bigger than his. You could overwhelm him by sheer firepower."

Gisborne frowned. "Dat ain't no good at all, kid-do. Robbo's a saint in this town. He's lousy wit' friends, from the mayor all the way up to the governor of Illinois. He ain't no gangster any more. He's Robin Hood. Anything happens to him, we got the whole city on our necks."

Marian's eyes narrowed. "But if he could disappear judiciously, the way Sheriff Glick did?"

"I t'ought of dat," Gisborne admitted gloomily. "But everyone would know he had been hit."

"Not necessarily," she said slyly. "Suppose Rob-

bo were to drop out of sight, and the next morning the newspapers got the story that Robbo had quit the rackets to devote all his time and fortune to charity. We could say that he was going to Africa to join Doctor Schweitzer."

Gisborne was pleased. "Say, dat would do it all right! Only one thing, Robbo and John is pals. We hit one, we'd have to hit the udder."

"So hit them both. . . . What about that oaf Crocker? Why not make it a three-way jackpot and shake off that fifty per cent bite?"

Gisborne shook his head. "Naw, we need Crocker for the pertection. Besides, we got his cut down to ten per cent." He studied her somewhat uneasily. "I never seen a babe as tough as you, Marian. Who was your mudder—Dutch Schultz?" ?

She laughed and wriggled closer to him, stroking his cheek with one hand. "I can be soft as well, Guy."

He reached for her clumsily, but she held him off. "Business before pleasure," she reminded him. "How are you going to hit Robbo and John?"

Gisborne's sloping forehead puckered, apeline. "Well . . . I dunno exactly. We want to keep it quiet, so I don't want no more guns in on it than we have to." He came to a decision. "I'll do it myself. Me and Blue Jaw. Robbo and John allus hole up in the club office after closing time, to count the take and things like dat. They're the last ones to leave. We'll hit 'em when they come out the back

door. It's plenty dark back there, and we'll hit 'em so fast they won't know what happened."

Marian was still not satisfied. "How are you going to dispose of the corpus delecti?"

"I ain't hitting anybody else," Gisborne said promptly. "I told you dat, baby. Three's a crowd."

"No, no!" Marian giggled. "I mean what are you going to do with Robbo and John after they're dead?"

Gisborne massaged his jaw thoughtfully. "Lessee . . . Friend of a friend of mine makes cornerstones. . . . Use your phone a minute?" He got up and walked to the telephone. "State four-one-four-nine, Operator." He looked at Marian who was bursting with curiosity.

"Cornerstones? I don't understand, Guy."

"Jussa minute, Marian . . . Hello, Twitch? Gisborne here. Listen, regarding your pal the stonemason. I'm looking for double accommodations . . . Yeah, the intended is Robbo and his buddy John. . . . No, I don't want two singles. Ain't he got a family size? . . . Look, you check and see what he can do for us. . . . Good . . . S'long, Twitch."

He hung up the receiver and came back to the couch. "Everything's gonna be fine, baby."

"Guy," she begged, "you simply must tell me about this cornerstone business."

Looking somewhat supercilious, Gisborne picked up the cold butt of his cigar and looked at it.

"Soitin things got to be kept perfessional secrets, Marian."

Marian wriggled against him and put her arms around his neck. "Please, Guy! You can tell *me*. After all, we are going into business together."

"Well, I dunno."

The straps of her gown slipped down over her shoulders, exposing a mouthwatering chunk of alabaster bosom. Gisborne's eyes bulged. Then she bit him softly on the ear.

"Don't be mean, Guysie. Tell me."

The gown went all the way down now. Gisborne tossed the cigar over his shoulder and bared his teeth. "Later, baby, later." Marian didn't even get a chance to put out the lights.

Marian Stevens had seen a great many things in her young life, but she had never witnessed a cornerstone being laid. It had been a full week since she had seen Guy Gisborne, and that was all right with Marian. He possessed a certain animal charm, she had to admit, but he lacked style. And those loathsome cigars! Still, he was a definite asset to the organization. And his scheme for getting rid of Robbo was very ingenious. The last word she had received from Gisborne was to meet him at the dedication ceremony for the new Hammacher Pretzel Company on the outskirts of Chicago on the following Friday.

"Don't be late, baby," Guy had told her. "I'll save you a seat."

When she arrived at the site, however, it was Gisborne who was late. As she took her seat beside Tomatoes McNeil, the hood whispered to her, "The chief and Blue Jaw might be slightly detained. They had a busy day yesterday." He laughed slyly. "I guess they wanted to make sure that Robbo and his pal John were comfortable." He glanced at the huge concrete block suspended from the crane at the corner of the new building.

Marian read the inscription: 1929—HAMMACHER PRETZEL COMPANY—THE TWIST MAKES THE DIFFERENCE.

Sheriff Crocker arrived just as the ceremony got underway and took the empty seat alongside Marian. Surreptitiously, he examined her out of the side of his eyes, and his heart beat faster.

"You a friend of Guy Gisborne's?" he inquired politely. Marian smiled and said, yes, she was. Crocker introduced himself. "Any friend of Guy is a friend of mine," he said with gallantry. "If there's anything I can ever do for you, don't hesitate to call on me, ma'am."

Marian was distracted as Hans Hammacher, the pretzel firm's founder, addressed the audience. He was a plump, red-faced little German who looked as if he enjoyed sampling his product and the bootleg brew that went so well with Hammacher pretzels. His accent was thick and guttural.

"Ladies und gentlemen. Ven I came to dis country fifty-four years ago, I had notting but der proud heritage of zix generations of pretzel benders. I was determined to make my fortune in America. But I knew I vould haff to do more den make just annoder pretzel. . . ."

As Hammacher rambled on, Marian whispered to Crocker, "What do you suppose is holding up Mister Gisborne?"

Crocker opened his mouth to answer her, but the words died in his throat as a low voice cut in from the seat directly behind them:

"I'll tell you what's holding up Mister Gisborne—that crane."

Marian spun around in her seat with a gasp. "Robbo!" She wilted under the solemn regard of Robbo, Little John, Will and Six Second. Compulsively her eyes traveled to the big cornerstone swaying gently in its chain sling, then came back to Robbo. Her throat was so dry she could hardly speak. "But—but—I thought—"

Robbo's gaze flitted to the cornerstone. "Change in plans," he said in good humor. "They gave our accommodations to somebody else."

Sheriff Crocker stared at the cornerstone, horror-stricken. "You mean—Guy. . . ?"

Robbo nodded. "Gisborne made a terrible mistake. He tried to do the job himself. You know the old saw: 'Never send a boy to do a man's errand.'"

Hammacher's Germanic voice droned in their

ears. ". . . Und so, I dedicate dis *schone* building to der millions of elbow-benders vot had made der name of Hammacher a household wort. . . ."

Marian licked her lips and rallied her inner forces. She managed a pinched smile, sickly but haughty. "So you *can* shoot from the navel."

Robbo's eyes glittered. "You've got forty-eight hours to clear out of Chicago or your navel will get blown right out through your backbone."

Robbo and his hoods stood up to leave. John dropped his hand lightly on Crocker's shoulder. "You better carry her suitcase, Sheriff."

Hans Hammacher was winding up his speech as they walked to the car.

". . . Und now, dear friends, ve vill all go into der bar. Der drinks are on Hammacher—alzo der pretzels!"

There was light applause as the cornerstone was lowered into place with a jarring *thunk*.

"Should we go in and have one for Gisborne?" John asked.

Robbo looked back across his shoulder and smiled. Affecting a German accent, he replied: "Vot's der matter mit you, Johann? Ve already gified der alt boy a short 'bier.' "

John and Will laughed merrily. "*Jawohl!*" they cried. "*Jawohl!*"

Chapter Thirteen

The name of the game was the same. Only the pigeon was different: Alvin Crocker. Candlelight, wine and roses, exquisite cuisine. Marian, looking her loveliest, in a gold lamé gown that fit her figure like the scales of a fish. Sheriff Crocker drooling over the bared half-moons of her breasts as he held her chair.

"Let's make ourselves comfy, Alvin," Marian suggested as she led him by the hand into the sunken living room.

When they were settled on the couch, Crocker gulped his brandy nervously. "Shouldn't you be packing, my dear? After all, Robbo did say forty-eight hours."

"Sheriff Crocker," Marian said solemnly, "sometimes I think you forget who you are. You are the symbol of law and order in Chicago. Surely, a man in your position has nothing to fear from a two-bit hood like Robbo."

"Oh, sure," Crocker said sarcastically. He picked up her brandy glass and drained that.

"Seriously, Sheriff, you're holding a pat hand—if you're not afraid to play your cards."

Crocker frowned. "How's that?"

"The trouble with you—Sheriff Glick and all the cops—is that you've been playing flunky to hoods so long, you've forgotten how to play cops and robbers. Basically, you are on the *right* side of the law, Sheriff, and Robbo and his kind are on the *wrong* side of the law. That's a weapon in itself that Robbo and his kind have no defense against. In a showdown the public will always unite one-hundred per cent behind law and order, particularly the women. Do you really believe that the females in this town like the idea of their men throwing away their salaries on bootleg booze, the gambling tables, and whores? Of course they don't. But up until now there hasn't been any alternative they can turn to. Law and lawlessness have been hopelessly intertwined. That's the only reason why a hood like Robbo has been able to make a hero out of himself. That Robin Hood malarkey is good publicity, 'steal from the rich to give to the poor,' the people enjoy it. But underneath the real reason why Robbo is popular is because his charities represent a way of thinking that is a complete turnabout from the philosophy which has held sway in this town for the past ten years: 'I'm out to get mine; screw you, Jack!' Robbo has been helping people who can't

help themselves. It's a spark of 'goodness,' and the public has rallied around it, the way a bunch of castaways would rally around a campfire in the black wilderness."

Sheriff Crocker was bewildered. "I still don't get it, Miss Stevens."

She placed one hand on his knee. "Sheriff, *we* have got to upstage Robbo, outdo the do-gooder. It's as I said before—the police are on the *right* side of the law to begin with. You have an ace up your sleeve, Alvin, and Robbo can't match it with all his charities. Stand up and be counted, Sheriff Crocker, declare yourself for law and order, and the people in this town will get behind you, I promise you."

Crocker was uncertain. "But Robbo—the rest of the crooks—what will they do?"

"*Nothing!* They won't do a thing. What are they but a handful of gunmen and bullies? You have a whole police force, an army. Use it! You'll take 'em like Grant took Richmond!" She slipped one hand behind his head and stroked the back of his neck. Her voice was a purr now. "You know, Alvin, the hoods have been making hay all these years only because you were protecting them. And they've kept slicing away at your fair share of the take until now all you get is a lousy ten per cent—nothing from Robbo. Don't you think it's about time you got what was coming to you?"

Crocker puffed out his chest self-importantly.

"You're absolutely right—Marian. You don't mind if I call you Marian?"

"Call me anything you want, Alvin."

Crocker's eyes lingered on the drooping neckline of her gown and he sighed. "You're an amazing girl, Marian."

Marian's laugh was low and throaty. "There's a woman behind every great man, Alvin."

Crocker squinted at the light on the end table. "Isn't it awfully bright in here?"

Marian laughed again and reached for the light switch.

The battle was on! In the next twenty-four hours thousands of pamphlets were circulated around the city:

SWEEP CHICAGO CLEAN!
STAMP OUT CRIME!
JOIN THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE
FOR BETTER GOVERNMENT!
ATTEND THE MEETING
THIS AFTERNOON AT TOWN HALL!

The response was electrifying. The auditorium was jammed with people. Hundreds more spilled over into the corridor and out onto the sidewalk. The speaker's platform was adorned with pillars of the church, the government, and the police department. Marian Stevens, clad in a shapeless black

dress that hugged her throat and hung to her ankles, was a compelling orator:

" . . . Bootlegging must go! Gambling must go! Prostitution must go! Are you content to raise your children in a city run by gangsters?"

"*No!*" chorused the audience.

"Do you want your sons to grow up idolizing a phony Robin Hood who uses soup kitchens as a front for printing counterfeit money? Who is training misguided orphans as future members of his gang?"

"*No!*" The hall rocked with the thunder of their voices.

Marian smiled with satisfaction. "Of course you don't. . . . And now, friends, I would like to introduce a man who has dedicated his life to public service, a man who has risked life and limb to defy the evil forces who have their filthy tentacles wrapped around our once-fair city, the man who is going to lead the fight for better government in Chicago—Sheriff Alvin Crocker!"

There was delirious applause as Crocker stepped up to the lectern, his gold star glittering brightly and inspirationally.

He cleared his throat. "Thank you, Miss Stevens . . . Thank you, ladies . . . Let me say that I wholeheartedly support the Women's League for Better Government and its aims and ideals . . . At this very moment, as I stand here, the great crusade

is already underway. My men have orders to drive the rats who infest this city out of their holes and destroy their breeding places. . . ."

It was all-out war, no quarter given. Chicago was a city under siege, throughout that day and all night, as police cars and vans bulging with uniformed patrolmen careened through the streets with their sirens screaming. Breweries were raided and demolished with ax and sledge. The streets they fronted ran ankle-deep in amber; the air was pungent with the smell of hops. The city jail was filled to capacity with prostitutes, bartenders, and gamblers. Miraculously, Robbo's Club escaped that first day's crusade. Robbo and his not-so-Merry Men huddled in the back room like generals in a bunker, monitoring the events taking place on the battlefield by radio and newspapers and scouts.

"The old burg is going crazy," Will said, as he slipped in the back door breathlessly. "Gisborne's old place is torn to pieces." He grinned. "Them dames did a better job than we did last time."

Robbo shook his head. "This is worse than the the Chicago Fire. . . . Al, did those guys clean out the back room at the soup kitchen, like I ordered?"

Allen Dale snapped to attention before his chief, who occupied his customary barber's throne. "I regret to say, sir, that our chain of liaison between HQ and the outposts has broken down completely."

Robbo looked to John. "So translate."

"Al and I tried to get through to the soup kitchen and the infirmary before, but the streets are all blocked off."

Robbo snapped his fingers at Will. "The phone."

Will handed him the instrument, and Robbo dialed the number of the soup kitchen. Jake answered.

"Jake, did you get rid of that counterfeiting stuff? Presses and paper, the whole bit?"

"*Goddammit!*" the foreman squawked. "*What goes on here? That Stevens dame phoned me this morning and told me to keep the presses rolling. I don't know who to take orders from any more.*"

Robbo was wild. "I give the orders, you bum! Now get busy—"

Jake's yell of anguish cut him off. "*Jesus Christ! We're being attacked!*" In the background Robbo heard the crash of splintering wood and the outraged battle cry of an army of female voices. He winced and put down the receiver.

"It's too late," he said in a dull tone. "They just hit the kitchen."

"What do we do now?" John demanded.

Will unholstered his gun. "We go down fighting, right, boss?"

"Put it away," Robbo said wearily.

The men tensed as in the distance a strange sound fell upon their ears, penetrating the subterranean depths of the club. The sound of tramping feet. Muffled voices singing:

"Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war . . ."

"My, God! What is it?" Allen Dale asked in fear.

A loud crash from the casino answered his question. John ran to the office door and threw it open. The hoods gathered behind him and stared in amazement at the tidal wave of females pouring in through the broken front entrance. Marian Stevens led them, looking like a black Joan of Arc. Their banners waved on high:

JUNK THE PUNKS!

ROBIN HOOD MADE A MOCKERY OF CHARITY!

GIVE ROBBO THE HEAVE-HO!

OUT WITH ALL THE HOODS FOR GOOD!

SWEEP CHICAGO CLEAN!

They swarmed over the casino and the bar like soldier ants, wielding hammers, sledges, axes, and picks, devouring the swank establishment and its lush appointments.

"Custer's Last Stand!" John shouted angrily and started into the club. "Why, those crazy broads—"

Robbo pulled him back inside the office and slammed the door shut and locked it. "Forget it, John. It won't do any good. It's all over."

"Boss!" Will was agonized. "You never was licked in your whole life. Gisborne, Glick, none of

'em could get the drop on you. You ain't gonna run from a bunch of silly dames?"

Robbo put his hand on Will's shoulder. "That's where you're wrong, pal. I *am* running—right out that back door."

John shook his head in disbelief. "One lousy female like Marian Stevens sends the whole world crashing down."

Robbo smiled sadly. "Naw, Johnny, she was only the fuse. The people are the dynamite that blew it apart. All along they've always wanted a clean town. They just needed somebody to tell 'em they wanted it. I can fight hoods. . . . I can fight crooked cops. . . . But the people I can't fight."

Allen Dale sighed, his eyes misting over. "Sir, you said that like the Great Emancipator. Those vital words: 'You may fool all the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all the time; but you can't fool all of the people all the time.' "

Robbo started for the back door. "Gentlemen, let's blow!"

Will and John brought up the rear. As they left, Will asked John, "What's the Great Emancipator?"

John shrugged. "I dunno, but if I ever catch a kid of mine doing it, I'll beat his ears off."

It wasn't until they were in the car that they noticed Allen Dale was absent. Robbo stared in horror at the building. "The poor bastard! Maybe he fainted or something."

John started to get out of the car. "I'll go see."

Just then the back door exploded in a dozen jagged pieces under the impact of axes and picks. A horde of screaming females streamed out into the mangy back yard. John withdrew and shouted to Will at the wheel, "Full speed ahead!"

The car rocketed down the alley, leaving the fist-shaking ladies choking in the dust. Robbo was positively stricken.

"They got poor little Al! That's a fate worse than death!"

When the others had panicked and run out, Allen Dale had taken his place behind Robbo's desk and calmly began to sort through a stack of correspondence abandoned in the rout of the Merry Men. He was whistling softly and making notations when the enemy burst into the office. He smiled engagingly.

"Good day, ladies. If you are looking for Robbo and his friends, they just left rather precipitously." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "They went thataway!"

"After them, girls!" shouted a fat woman who resembled an Army top sergeant, and the enraged troops attacked the door.

Marian came slowly over to the desk and examined the little man suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"Allen Dale, at your service, ma'am," he replied gaily.

"You don't talk like one of Robbo's hoods, but what are you doing here?"

Dale removed his glasses and polished them on one tongue of his red tie. "I never was a member in any official status, Miss Stevens. I served Robbo, and the gang, in the capacity of secretary and public relations adviser." He smiled smugly. "I doubt that even Robbo himself had as full a grasp of his operations as I did."

Marian's eyes narrowed. "Wait a minute—you're the one who invented that Robin Hood gimmick!"

He bowed in acknowledgment. "I have a million ideas as good—or even better."

Marian's smile was shrewd and radiant. "Mister Dale . . . It's a sincere pleasure to make your acquaintance. . . . Tell me, are you doing anything for dinner this evening?"

Dale beamed back at her. "I'll be there, Miss Stevens. Is seven too early?"

Chapter Fourteen

“After the ball was over,
After the break of day . . .”

In the fall and early winter of 1929, people were singing the old favorite with tongue in cheek. The Big Crash. The ball was over. The glass coach had changed back into a pumpkin. Cinderella went back to being a charwoman. Ex-bankers were selling haberdashery at Macy's department store, and their Ivy League sons were running the elevators in the same store. There weren't many job openings for ex-hoods—even Robin Hoods.

The Merry Men had drifted apart with the exception of Robbo, Little John, and Will. The three musketeers got a break around Christmas time, playing Santa Clauses for the Salvation Army. Stationed close to one another on Chicago's main drag, they stood lonely vigils in their moth-eaten Santa costumes with pillows stuffed into the trousers and

wearing bedraggled dirty-cotton beards. They rang their little brass bells and gave out with a "Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!" to those who dropped a coin into the iron collection pots.

A drunk staggered up to Will on Christmas Eve and tossed a handful of change in the general direction of the bucket.

"Merrry 'ris'mas!" he mumbled and staggered on, not caring that three dimes had missed the mark and landed in the snow, which was beginning to fall quite heavily. Will picked up the coins and juggled them in his palm introspectively. He put down his bell and walked to Little John's post on the next corner.

"Hey, what about a cup of java. My feet are numb all the way up to the knee."

John's face lit up. "Sure thing. Let's get the boss." They walked across the street to Robbo's corner. Robbo was jigging in place to keep warm and singing at the top of his lungs:

"Ho, ho, ho, Merry Yuletide,
'Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa la la la la . . ."

"Ain't you overdoing it, Robbo?" John asked with a grin.

"It's either this or freezing to death, like they do in the Yukon."

"We all need a break," Will said. "Coffee?"

Robbo looked at him guardedly. "Who's buying?"

Will laughed. "Me. Some old lush missed the bucket."

"Lead on." Robbo put down his bell and the three shivering Santas made their way down the street toward a small hash joint on the next block.

As they crossed the street, Robbo nodded at a small office building which had recently been erected on an empty lot. There was a moving van parked in front of the entrance, and office furniture was being carried inside. A sign painter was meticulously applying gilt lettering to the plate-glass door.

The trio of Santas stopped short, stricken by what they read.

"National Headquarters of the Women's League for Better Government," John said aloud. "Isn't that the thing that Stevens dame started, to wreck us?"

Robbo shook his head unbelievably. "Can you beat that! Ten to one she's using it as a front for counterfeiting and God only knows what other rackets!"

"Gee!" Will said. "You don't suppose it's legit? Maybe the reformer bit really went to her head?"

"You kidding?" John snorted. "That dame, legit? Naw, you can bet she and Crocker are teamed up in some crooked deal."

Robbo was thoughtful. "Still . . . I wonder . . ."

The answer came from an unexpected source as a large, sleek black limousine pulled up to the curb, splashing dirty slush all over the three Santas. As

the chauffeur came around to open the door for his passengers, Robbo shouted to him angrily, "Hey, bud, why don't you watch where you're going?"

He started after the chauffeur, then froze as a woman wrapped in mink got out of the car. It was Marian Stevens! A small man wearing a homburg hat and an expensive topcoat with a mink collar exited behind her. He lifted his head and stared straight into Robbo's eyes. Allen A. Dale!

He examined the three folorn figures without recognition, and in a voice full of sympathy said, "That was terribly careless of Chauncy, gentlemen. . . . Here, wait a minute." He took a wallet out of his inside breast pocket and flashed a bulging stack of greenbacks. He peeled off three five-dollar bills and handed one to each Santa.

"Happy Yuletide, gentlemen! Oh, this miserable snow! Just look what it's done to my new spats!" With that he took Marian's arm and escorted her into the building.

Robbo, John and Will stared after them, stunned and speechless. John was the first to find his voice. "Why, that dirty little double-crossing snake. Let me at 'im!" He moved toward the entrance, but Robbo grabbed his arm.

"No! It ain't worth it, John. You wanna spend the holiday in jail?"

"At least we'd get a Christmas dinner," John grumbled.

Will held up his five-dollar bill. "We still get it. With all the trimmings."

John looked at his bill with loathing. "I oughta take this and shove it—"

"We'll enjoy it in good health," Robbo said reasonably.

"Say, I wonder what happened to Crocker?" Will asked.

Robbo looked up at the impressive new building. "One thing, he never would have let her cut him out of a deal as fat as the one she's got going for her now. . . . Say-y-y-y . . ." He turned and walked slowly toward the corner of the building. Will and John followed with perplexed looks on their faces.

"What's the matter, boss?" John asked.

Robbo paused directly in front of the spanking-new cornerstone. "The cement ain't even dry," he murmured, rubbing the mortar with his fingers. He read the inscription:

W.L.B.G.—1929

He looked back at John and Will. "You don't suppose. . . ?"

Understanding glowed in the faces of the ex-hoods. Then John stepped forward and banged on the stone with his fist, laughing softly.

"Merry Christmas, Sheriff, old boy!"

Will scowled. "I still don't like the idea of that

dame and Allen A. Dale getting away with all this. There just ain't no justice."

"Maybe more than you think, Will," Robbo said lightly.

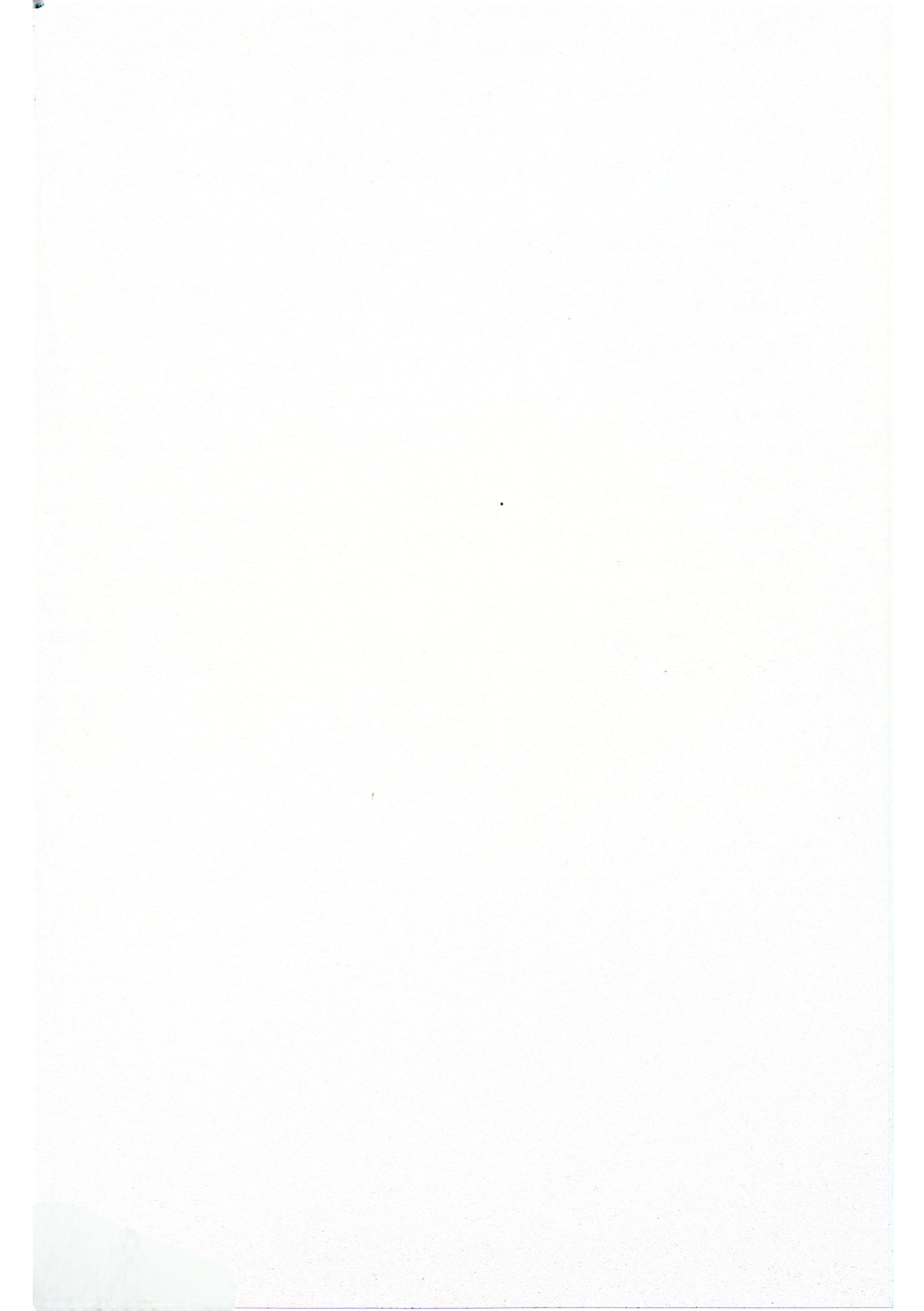
John blinked. "How do you mean?"

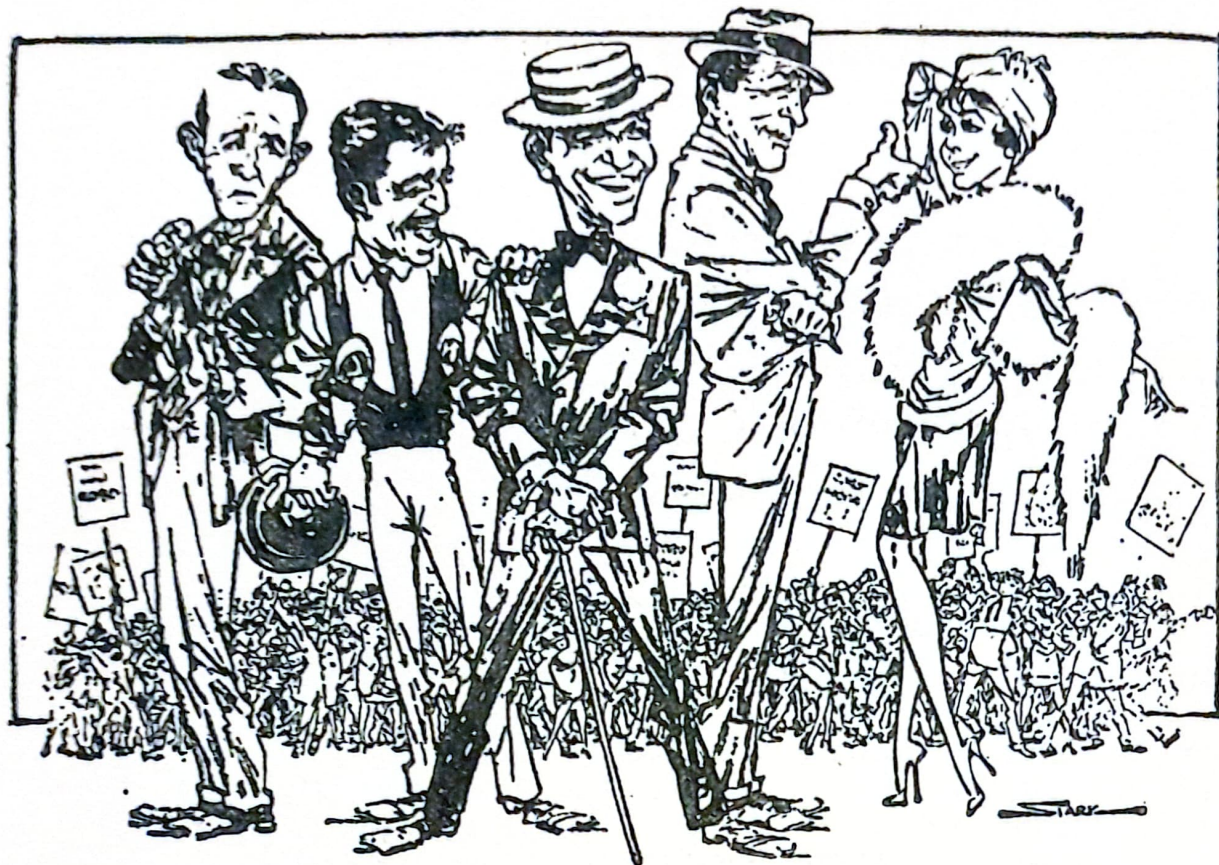
Robbo grinned. "Well, for one thing, they got each other. I'll bet they don't dare to turn their backs on each other—even in bed."

John whistled through his teeth. "Yeah, how about that! And just think what their kids are gonna be like!"

The three of them began to laugh, and Robbo linked arms with Will on one side and John on the other. "How about that coffee, you guys?"

They marched off down the street with a sprightly gait, harmonizing "Jingle Bells." Robbo and his ex-hoods were very merry men!





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